



Early Books

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The Skaters, 2005
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I. Opera Bufa

Preface

An opera bufa (or “opera buffa”) is a comic opera. It’s a term and a genre which Mary Evelyn Harju introduced me to. The idea of writing the poetry equivalent of an opera bufa is one that occurred to me as viable for a number of reasons, in the mid-Aughts. The first reason was practical—it was time to start writing books, rather than just writing poems in a scattershot manner. It was also difficult not to notice that avant-garde/experimental poets in my age group were having a more than reasonable amount of success with book-length manuscripts of interlocking prose poems. When a group of younger poets who had all done their MFAs at U of Mass Amherst (Mary Harju had also done undergrad time there) descended on Center City Philly in the mid-Aughts (Eric Baus, Nick Moudry, Laura Solomon, Juliette Lee, Dorothea “Dottie” Lasky), they brought with them this bias and sensibility. Eric Baus, particularly, though he only spent a year at Temple (’06-’07), managed to impress on me the many advantages of approaching book-length manuscripts this way. I decided, however, that if I was going to bow to a trend and do what Baus had done, I was going to do it my way—with a strong narrative voice and backbone, and with thematics in general not neglected. The idea of writing a comic opera appealed to me, because it is an unlikely juxtaposition (avant-garde poetry with comic opera) and because it would allow me to explore the interrelationship between music, language, and performance.

Opera Bufa was my first full-length print book. It was released almost precisely co-terminously with the Blazevox e-book *Beams* in the early autumn of ’07. When I visited Chicago again in early ’08, I managed to place a few copies at Myopic Books in Wicker Park, where I had read in December ’06. Through an interesting collusion of events, it was picked up by Chicago poetess Laura Goldstein to teach at Loyola University Chicago; and when I visited Chicago in the summer of ’08, I lectured to one of Laura’s classes at Loyola behind *Opera Bufa*. It was included on their syllabus. Goldstein herself wrote a perceptive review of the book for the Chicago e-zine *moria* which is included here.

Of all of my books, *Opera Bufa* is the one which was born most squarely from the context of contemporary avant-garde poetry—though bits of Wordsworth and Eliot are woven into the text, it has the stamp of the mid-Aughts Amer-Po zeitgeist on it. It is still more continental than was common for that niche, which I designed it to be. One disadvantage which *Opera Bufa* has is that the book is more than the sum of its pieces; but when the pieces have been isolated and published apart from the ur-text, they cannot be representative. The book needs to be read as a whole, or not at all. It is also a book which has spawned some imitations. The narrative voice here is light and whimsical (as befits an opera bufa), and not too fraught with multiple meanings or philosophical quiddities. In other words, and like *Chimes* (though for different reasons), it is a book Americans can accept. As such, it has been taught with some frequency in America (especially in the Chicago area), and embraced. Still, I would like to hope that the lightness and breeziness of the text carry some serious undercurrents—that literature, like opera, is a kind of performance; and that the performative nature of texts make them active, rather than passive, agents in the world. The text also argues for a frank approach to sex and sexuality; rather than the coy evasiveness then more common. That texts can and should be seductive is something Roland Barthes

used to discuss; and Barthes and France are an influence here.

Adam Fieled, 2013

#1

Losing is the lugubriousness of Chopin. What's lost might be a sea shell or a tea cup or the bloody scalp of an Indian; it hardly matters. When you are lost, the heart recedes from exterior currents, too much in sync with itself, its groove vicissitudes. Each encounter, rather than revealing new rhythms, is experienced as a clangorous din, a pounding. The effect of this pounding is to push the heart deeper and deeper into pitiless darkness. The darkness is pitiless because it has no clear ending. The rhythms are pitiless because we do not know how they began. We find pity and it betrays us with a stray fondle. We squirm within ourselves to the sound of the Devil's opera bufa.

#2

You may stride streets like Oskar with tin drum, cracking glass with a solid shriek, taking Madonnas hostage, assaulting exhausted nurses lying prone on shag carpets. There are nurses and nurses; some have carnations. You want to serve; your hands are still masterful.

#3

Pluto sets Orpheus on your ass. Plucking out a minor-seventh bridge, he holds you in legato thrall. Rhythms become streams of possible shoe-lace, slugs of 3 a.m. Scotch, lust after thy neighbor's daughter, mooning on the lawn.

#4

The principle of sufficient reason has pinned you to a mattress and is coming inside you. You are a plantation officer after the lost war. Your cache of black carnations marks out a no-fly zone, bloody scalps of third wheels. You see how richly layered you are, but frosting is visible.

#5

It's not funny, that you've left a body count. You're up in stiff urban trees, you've known unrest. Not that you don't harmonize with concrete; just that you mix concretely. There is recalcitrance in your Wellington boots, a blatant sell-out in your dancing; China girls approach you in dank basements.

#6

Am I daft to see imbecility in mercy? Three men, one gesturing, address perfumes of Venus. Yes, I affirm certain deadness in disturbances of black jackets. No, I do not believe a blue sports jersey is a treasure. I have made up a song to go with the song of this chanteuse. What silly trills, love of languor, appreciation of origins of apples. The core is not to be ditched. The apple is not to be pulled.

#7

If you were a yellow balloon in tall leaning trees, I'd be a girl in purple impaled between pillars. If you were a cup of finished ice cream, I'd be a brown-eyed moon-goddess. Is the human heart a Parisian kitchen? Are lamb-chops better than avarice? Are you churned like butter from Dantescan depths? Am I warm and willful as a shop-girl's thighs, stuck with grasses to a farmer's boots? Lunatics hover on branches, pushing me down into sleep; swans at the window, watching hail fall in diagonal darts. Your railings border me, yet toss my words up into gleaming squares. Priests look back and forth, veiny hands. Shadows strike the angels from their perch. Somewhere inside is a reference.

#8

This is all a bridge between a verse and chorus. That's how the sky exudes its musk, right before breaking down and buying a ranch. You find my earrings glamorous, and they were left by my bed by a lover who learned from porn. She was always crabby.

#9

It's always brown-hewn burglars sending drain-you vibes through Ethernet. Not that one can internalize mind-scabs, but that the brown-minded must spread shit. What kind of tumescence gets consummated via these kinks? What ribald ruby-red jumps live from these booby traps? Nothing but antiquated horse-corsets passing murals, gun-slung brothers sprung from Rite Aid, orange vodka-eaters. I fit into this like a mentholated ciggy in a Presbyterian church, which is to say, the city has heroes ducking under awnings, semen smells in tightly packed alleys, particularities.

#10

What does he say, the porridge-hearted victor, as troops rub ermine on his thighs? He is not only hermaphroditic, he complains of being too much like Cleopatra. He is only a bruised pear, yet words come out of him, tunes replay in his head like flies on ice cream. I am him as a fish is a bicycle but a fish on a bicycle would be too much, like Henna-dyed Shakespearean joust-a-bouts.

#11

All minor chords are dreadful when prolonged by Valium. Not that I condescend to be anything but minor. Not that I'd give myself an A. Actually, I would, but then not every poem I like begins *Roses are red, Violets are blue*. I understand newness. I understand membranes. I understand that a bald pate does not signify superior understanding. I can't give you anything, and vice versa. Go back to the opening.

#12

It is simply bereavement that leads us here, to these images. It is a matter of fucking upstairs, getting the maids wet. What you see is what you see, cadavers in copses, perfectly good mushrooms, a tent to shelter red-heads. Don't accuse yourself of blasphemy for marching sideways, crab-like, towards Exit signs. Any kind of soft-shoe swagger remains inappropriate. Stay where shadows press themselves in upon you. Stay with the purple riders and their sage buttons. Stay safe within danger.

#13

O, for the strength to strip a stripper. Isn't that wanted by the forces swirling in eddies around the Delaware? Isn't that what becomes material? Not if you think one night can be micro, macro, all kinds of crows. Not if what you really want is to pick at my liver. Let's face it, you were never more than a soul-pygmy. You were a soul-gypsy by yourself, to yourself. We learn as life elongates that personal feelings about persons are not important. We learn that we are all pygmies. Your failure was in measuring yourself against ants, as if a beam and a magnifying glass could cure you. You should be so lucky.

#14

I can't help but influence pigeons in the cream cheese. You know what I mean. When you eat something that's bigger than your head, you get messy. It's been that way since a flock of seagulls pitched tents in New Mexico. They were just camping, they said. Anyway, I detonate. I feel it is best to confess right at the beginning. What I confess is a salad at a fast-food restaurant, of which I feel dispossessed. Things go on. Things continue. It's all about systems. It's all about seagulls.

#15

Personally, I don't care if a baseball penetrated your basement window. All I see is a framework of jagged glass. I don't much like it, nor do I consider Klonopin an appropriate substitute for Independence Day. If (on alternate Fridays) you remember to do the funky chicken, so much the better. What I want to see is you coming out of come. I want to see geysers, all-sorts, licorice, Now-and-Laters. I want to see you move past Debussy into Mozart. You know, play faster or something.

#16

You're all out to lunch, you Amherst wafer-eaters. You forgot that Billy the Kid, unlike Christ, was not resurrected. The pictures you leave on lampposts signify low self-esteem. Your cozy brasserie is not to be bush-whacked. As for me, I have moved beyond ten-of-swords mentalities. Not that I count you out. I just don't know what bag you are zipped into. It looks not very fur-lined to me.

#17

I don't know who my friends want. I could be a French-speaking gopher. I could grope every freckle on a red-head's behind. I could fickle myself in plaster or plastic. Of the many possibilities, I feel closest to mother's voices please-touching; concretes, red-brick wings, soaring up through Baudelaire's tendonitis. I ache with him.

#18

I like you, yes, but it's serious, kid. Don't imagine you can hide your backyard in a magnolia tree's bark-shedding trunk. If your passion arrives in a non-Christian context, say *Thank you Buddha*. You will never lack conundrums as long as line after line after line demands to be born like a good kidney bean.

#19

Being stalked by a sting-ray in slap-happy crematoriums is not a simple matter. Deadness develops, makes lists, checks things off. You-don't-have keeps adding up to gaggles of slugs underneath.

#20

That night I had your heart-attack, I was alone, moon-streaked, somnolent. There is a soul-Net bigger than the one we know. There are things you can catch, Piscean, Aquarian, Scorpion. Back on that sun-glassed, sin-spattered street, back into my eager tense-ready nodding, back into that inter-connected nexus emitting blue-purple sparks over every picture in the paper, every poem in the picture, every pruned, festooned image in the poem. I've got your back.

#21

First thing in the morning, I hear about a Mob-mad Dick wearing a black velvet hood all over Washington, stomping weedy ground in SS boots. This is a man who sings Gregorian chants as he pulls hair-trigger shit-loads from his arse. I don't connect, and my non-connection includes running four miles along the scud-less Schuylkill. I see an edgy apocalypse in each half-mile marker, a prod at each lemonade stand, a clown-class dragging tired skin across street-bones. As you grow older, oldness grows like a fungus around your extremities. Now, I sit and write this opera and it appears like a walrus or otter saying *I am that I.*

#22

There is no place in business for me. I was born to endlessness of any kind, of the kind that breathes fire dragon gold through nostrils of untamed street-corner harmonies. Despite this fact, I like trees, I could go camping if I weren't so marshmallow soft, such a Hercules of perpetually moving inaction. Or, I could just go camp.

#23

I can't make sense of anything anymore, not even riding the trolley past a gleaming, soot-speckled Mini-Mart in morning's ardent sunshine. Every passenger inhabits a non-Prada paradise, where what you have is simply a matter of Kool composure, fertile lassitude, flea markets and the plethora of miniscule trinkets therein. Every grainy facet floods the eye with color, but blackness, my dear, is the ground we walk on. Blackness is the door to rebirth. I want to come out and be colorless. I want to come out and give ashram orders to a meditating world. Order itself is beyond me.

#24

I do not give a damn for any rankings, as I know preeminence is an old European myth meant to pickle pens and keyboards. I have judged myself, found myself a person, found myself not an artist but an art-is, an ink otter, a bubble-blown frog hopped up on saying personal things backwards and masked. I sing this scintillating aria not for the bull-nuts in the Peanut Gallery, but for all readers w nuts. Keep your snake-tail eating language for language-guinea pigs, keep your pug-face for the aesthete tax collecting slobber-heads. I've hewn a new key from a new, chicken-scented, turkey-basted variety of froth. I know damn well what you've hewn. Hew off.

#25

Assuming I remain a tag-labeled individual, naught remains but to white out any yellows, apply patches of loose color to squarely composed areas, brushstroke a raw rheumy red heart, beaten like a time-rusted gong, onto each firmament that rises and sets on canvases arrayed, grey-grained. This I will do, w no uneasiness. What must be shown is mandatory as income tax.

#26

What's between me and you is this flower-wall in a rose-fringed corner of some invisible curtained garden. I am very far away from what knowing is.

#27

My friends and I are groping to create a science of imaginary solutions, one of which is Pepto-Bismol repeated in vats and poured over two copulating sweat-drenched animals emitting squeals in octaves. The history of popcorn is a minor third that can be squelched by intense bed-thuds. Every mattress is a major third, every home-stretch a suspended fourth, every new Kama Sutra position a bent note in the Dorian mode. There is no grey. It's wild.

#28

I say “we,” I mean the people counting ravens. I mean the circle-minded carnival
otters holding down forts. We know who we are, but are very far from knowing who planted
what. I say, use the turnips to write, make a cake w teeth-pealed carrots, but save the lettuce.
We should hold on to the village green until a new harrow is made, which can turn us over,
on Proustian sick-beds, to enumerate levels and layers of cockroaches, clinging to life,
courting Keith Richards.

#29

There is an engraving on the corner of your left cheek, placed there by me, which speaks of dead queens, frilly shirts, stoned wanderers. What I mean is, I am capable of bestowing silver-stenciled decorations on you, and will continue to do so for as long as I can sharpen my tools along the edges of your fire escape. We have forged, in the smithy of our souls, a country recreated from borders of what was dreamed between us, rose-delicate, so much investigation. There is naught left to shimmy but little diamond-hooded imps sprung out from tips of our fingers, ground down to astral sparks when light is brought down, channeled through ritual.

#30

Things tank, things fall apart, centers cannot hold, and the only second coming you can count on you can download for free on the Internet. I am personally involved in sun-breaks following storms, scandals of moss and weeds, kick-back payments over pots of world-weary gumbo, so much *meshigas*. What I am looking for is an arpeggio including history, a vibrato that is not quiet, an aria in the real language of men.

#31

If you weren't so scandal-happy, I might consider depositing a ton of bricks between your carburetor and fan-belt. The fact is, darling, that my opera is not soap. All kinds of buffoonery have meaning in this microcosmic environment, like goldfish eating Trollope-reading directors of electricity. I am confident that I will not be left alone. I am also sure that the fish-monger backwards-going Polonius-type psychos will get stuck behind me. *Eat me*, I will say to them, and invite them to look, touch, fondle, grope the thin air around my queen's shins.

#32

I have danced on pins and needles since Socrates realized semantics were a peach of a smash of a pop-tart. I have encompassed centuries, I ride in gondolas, I celebrate Lent, I have coffee with Balzac. If you want to surround me with anything but freedom, Dante has opened up a specific ring in Hades just for you. It is shaped like a wall-papered nursery. There are malicious spirits on baseball cards. You become gum.

#33

Out there, in the wider world, automatons spit shards, bullets, videotapes, all wound to slit and reveal vulnerable redness. They are beyond laughter. The air they breathe is flesh they bite into. The beds they sleep in are nailed, and they are nailed, and consciousness becomes a loose, rusty, crud-tinged nail. I wonder that I am anxious, and laugh at myself for wondering. What place for Don Rickles in a boot-camp of the soul? *Harder, harder*, I say to myself, doing breast-stroke laps in the deep end of brine vats.

#34

It is brave to be old so that one may become young. You can do double dismounts like a cat on pot. You can move beyond the *dead man hopping* phenomenon. When you sit in a half-lotus, your lolling tongue rests comfortably on old metaphors. Suddenly, the moon is enough. Suddenly, flowers are worth looking at, and you are a person. There is splendor in just walking around. There is air to breathe. Who knows, you might be able to stay a person for more than a moment. With luck, axioms become trees. Climb them.

#35

I sing to her in raspy, whiskey-voiced bliss. It's a honky-tonk song with considerable tonal variation. Not far from twelve-bar blues, it's got a turnaround and a bridge, including four beats on the relative minor. You might mistake this section for *Earth Angel*, and in fact that's what she is. The city's squeal and tremor sings along with me— rev, snarl, strum. We make a Hallelujah Chorus for a new Iron Age.

#36

I am seeing Mercury go Retrograde in a fly's anus. There is a delay in delivering my poetry to the old wooden bucket. Yet, I roll with the punches. Just yesterday I gathered geraniums to give to madmen. I ate a liver sausage sandwich, perched in grass. I found myself rooted in history. Spare me your stories of insubstantial fluff. Spare me the stale victuals, the I'm-on-top rhetoric. I have seen a caduceus in the sky, pointing to a pile of my papers. I am wanted by the FBI, and the Central Intuitive Agency. I project to the back row. Though life be a confectionary lemon, I suck it.

#37

There is backwards masking mixed into the mix tape I sent you. Satan himself says he is himself but you need a turntable to hear it. The experience of hearing Satan's voice backwards may be absorptive for you. It was for me. I immediately fornicated with three high priestesses. I did a line of cocaine off a shag carpet, put on an Andy Gibb tee shirt, and wandered around looking for Snow Caps. I became possessed by a demon and I rose off the bed. I astral projected into the kitchen and my head was a Necco wafer.

#38

I was a cadaver in a copse until a cop arrested me. I was a convict in a jumpsuit until I jumped bail. I was a hitchhiker under galactic moon dust until I saw the sun. I was the sun as it rose and I shone on my dead self. I was a copse under the sun. I was a convict and a copse. I was all of this until I learned that you are what you see. I was what I saw until I saw that my eyes were shut. I opened my eyes to a kind of vacancy. I opened my arms to delinquency. I do not see anything now, and it rings.

#39

I did it to myself. I rolled down hills. I twirled in circles. I partook of strange drugs. It was on a trip of this kind that I met Sunny Jim, who claimed to have many minds. I never believed him, still don't. Why should I?

#40

I was playing a lute in the Court of Ferdinand. I was being courtly. I was displaying all the *sprezzatura* that I could. I did not reckon that it was actually 2007. I remained strangely unaware that electricity had been discovered. I picked up a daffodil; it became a cell phone. I picked up a quill; it became a bottle of Nyquil. I realized that I was in the wrong century. I would have to live through hundreds of years to get to where I was. I would have to spontaneously regenerate. I saw my lute become a Stratocaster. I saw the court become the Bowery Ballroom. I only knew two scales, and I played them every which way. I heard deafening applause. I saw Ferdinand wearing Speedos.

#41

I have made a habit of courting buffoons. I have listened to a British waitress ask me, *would you like a scone or a buffoon?* I have eaten scones and buffoons together, with cheese and cherry preserves. I have felt that scones and buffoons are somehow related, especially where Tennyson is concerned. I have felt Tennyson to be both a scone and a buffoon. I am ready (finally) to eat a scone alone. I no longer need buffoons in my life. I have covered *Freebird* for the last time. I am ready to be free. I am ready to cherry.

#42

I often feel surrounded by lightweights. I frequently shine a light on their lightness, only to find blackness hidden in their cuffs. I hear them, lightweight and dark, pronouncing on the eligibility of cretins. I see them applauding a show of daft penguins. I drink with them, and they out-drink me. I talk with them, and they out-talk me. I write alone, and I have found no other way to sing. I box them simply by breathing.

#43

There was a girl on a hill. She was shrouded by a wash of shadow. In the background, a steeple peeked through blue. There were clotted sky-arteries. Light was moving on the hill and on the girl. She remained fixed. A sound like thunder made jarring waves. She was facing me. I was floating above a different hill. The picture before me was like a face. The girl knelt where a mouth should've been.

#44

There I was in bed in a toy store. I had a fever. I was also a girl in the corner who wanted to get in bed with me. There was a blonde apparition, a loudmouth, pacing a bit like Patton. I felt strained from being me and also being someone else. In retrospect, it seems strange that no toys were visible. It is also curious that, in the dream, I happened to be a famous musician. No determinate ending presented itself. Patton might've become a stuffed animal, I can't remember. Something was said that meant war: *don't toy with me.*

#45

I spotted a bluebird. I got in an amorous tussle. I saw a thousand hues, and each was differently used. *She's got soul*. I felt it was a matter of vibes. The lightweights and toy stores were behind me. The world was reduced to a back seat. The bluebird was a woman and the woman was more than just flying. Each word had a depth and a weight. Each look had a color and a shape. Each moment that passed was *on the way home*. Our sound: *pianissimo*.

#46

What has been lost thus far? It's just tar on a highway, bound for ocean. Or, it's the migratory flight of a carrier pigeon. It is all things that move and breathe, coalesced into sound. It is Odette's tune in Swann's mind. It is octaves, repeated in a funhouse mirror until a decibel level is reached that a dog alone may hear. I am the dog that hears, the dog that conducts, the dog that puts bones on tables. The bones are all gone under a hill. The dogs are all gone under a footlight. There are no footnotes.

#47

Here is where a climax should be: in a closet, freshly washed, on a hanger. There is a crescendo in stasis, like a Buddha-as-housemaid. So, no shattered glass in this opera.

#48

Maria Callas smokes a post-coital cigarette. Her legs dangle over the stage's edge. She has been pounded. She, too, has left a body count. She has been on the hill. She has been a mouth, a bluebird, a curtain. *We are all purple riders*, she says, blowing smoke. *We are all tender-hearted as eunuchs, small as mix tapes*. Maria, the Devil has entered you. Things have become what they are not. The opera-goers are restless. You had better produce more than ashes. You had better throw out your stubs. It's encore time.

#49

I follow Maria to the stage door. I walk with her through a flower-wall. *Tender hearts are made to be broken*, she says, *I want your ton of bricks*. I think that Maria is promiscuous. I think I am in bed with Baudelaire and Jeanne Duval. I think many confused thoughts. Meanwhile, Maria has taken out a caduceus. She caresses it. She calls it many names. Somehow it is attached to me. Somehow it is wired to feel what I feel. We lay in a half-lotus. We lay in dank repose. Maria has already done this. I wonder if this amounts to *La Boheme* for weirdos. Skin is our funny toy store. We buy it.

#50

You spent forty-seven poems looking for me, Maria says. You were talking in expansive, fluorescent, Crayola circles. All I can say is, I remember poundings and baseball cards and tons of bricks. I remember daftness and deftness disappearing. I remember gum, bruises, abusing ice cubes. I know that I had to dream an opera to really sing. I know I had to dream singing to really write. As for fluorescence, those crayons were always my favorites anyway. If the color is off, it's because my set collapsed, if not into nullity, then into plurality. I remember a city and a story. I am many stories up.

#51

It is left to Maria to return me to my duties. *Your song is a newly filled crescent moon*, she says, gesturing to my eyes, where notes flow into. Maria has made a hologram of herself for me. She has strapped it to my hands like cuffs. She has left me offstage, recounting when I found a way of being in tune with rows of chairs.

#52

Am I a tired old man? Am I mysteriously young? Or is it that youth and old age both have equal leverage in song, like major and minor? Whatever stage of life has been born into me, I know now that song cannot be spared when life and death adhere. I know life and death, I know the contours of them; they are bed sheets to me. They do not wind around, but lay beneath each performance. They are the reason why buffoons must be rebuffed, why dodos must be done in. They are no kind of beggar's banquet. Adherence is my tribute to this interminable fret board, this double-stopped coil.

#53

I am beginning an inventory. I am in possession of songs. I am in possession of labor, and love's labors lost. I am capable of experiencing Mini-Mart's. I inhabit an operatic landscape. I have loved a girl. I have also loved a Maria. I am noticing a strange poverty in richness. I am cleaning up the stage for this to happen again. I am counting on scones to butter themselves. I am haunted by remorse for missed notes. I am nonetheless proud to have escaped the flatted fifth, *el Diablo en musica*. I am lucky because the Devil paid for my stage props. I have torn up our contract. I have contacted my attorney.

#54

The dressing room is filled with flowers. I wash off make-up, remove stage garments, congregate with various chorus members. I have moved from “I” to “we”. The opera is the story of all of our lives. When it ends, our lives may be recreated. This is possible because we know of what we consist. We are dust and dreams and druthers and so many cockroaches. No one will stop anytime soon. No one will give up rays of moon. No one will forget the feeling under footlights. Adrenaline permeates our conversations. There is an after-show party to be attended. There are hook-ups waiting for all of us.

#55

I am walking streets, arm in arm with a woman who designs props. It feels like the first mild day in March. I give in to idleness, thinking of Maria. Memory is sweet as reality, reality is sweet as dreams, and I have learned to what extent dreams are real. They may not be solid as a cast-iron pot, but they are *enough*. I feel this strongly as I kiss Ms. Props. I feel this even more strongly as she reaches around my neck as if to throttle me. *Oh no*, I think, *is this when I have to start singing again?* Alas, she only wants to feel me more deeply. It is the hour of feeling, when singing must cease.

#56

Ms. Props, jealous, wants to know about Maria. She, too, wants a ton of bricks. A song pops into my head, just a germ, and I know that another opera is beginning, as night bleeds into dawn. *Never you mind*, I say, *you are as pain-worthy as she, as precious in your meddling, as diligent in your scavenger hunt*. I feel a C chord changing to E minor, then an A minor changing to G, and I realize what Eternal Return means. It means that every fresh breath of life plants seeds that must die. It means that the death of music is the birth of tragedy that must be expressed musically. It means all this fooling around must be paid for in the oven of creation. Every kiss must be minted.

#57

I am writing again, and losing. I am lost in a funhouse maze. I must make it a new opera or die trying. I have had lovers of the last opera, now I must find lovers of an opera to come. What will subsist from opera to opera? It is a sense that our world is out of tune, and that the artist must set it in order; a sense that the artist is, in fact, an officer in an army of puffins, and commands an elite puffin brigade; finally, the recognition that songs must be created because too much silence is composed of dust and ash. I must create a staged Underworld, to prevent the actual Underworld from pummeling my life. I must beat Pluto at his own flaccidly undulant game. I score with every chord change.

#58

If only I felt that writing operas could change everything. If only I felt that life, concentrated into song, could be fruit juice for thirsty joggers. Alas, it is not so. Open mouths will continue to be unfilled. Open legs will continue to accept dross. Things that close, chemical, mineral, and otherwise, will remain closed; nothing will change. I can only do one thing: make nothing change beautifully. I am no longer haunted by echoes of Puccini. I know that all music is good, being music. I know that our most real riches are built of loss. I have become a giant of losing. I am simply monstrous, and monstrously fond of the Earth and its million daily deaths. I am consoled by no exit. I am dead to deadness, alive to death and life, and directed by street signs. Yet, I do not yield.

#59

This has been something. This has been more than cadaverous. This has been a seeded fruit moved by wind into a reclining position. This has been a way and a means, an end and a beginning, a pedestrian's right to cross streets in Vienna. This has given me a wing-tipped prowling carnivore, and I am meat as others are. As I move on, I am stricken with a half-nervous, half-ebullient sense of Eternal Return. What is coming has already come and will come again, plaintive as human nightingales trained for five octaves. What is coming is coming back to the loss that will be gained perpetually. O flip sides of paradox, how inscrutable and Sphinx-like you seem, until a bullet-chord pierces you, until an arpeggio elicits an earth-shattering purr!

#60

I can think of no afterthought. I can only say: *here I have been*. Music must bleed: let it. It will bleed into more and more of itself. It will spontaneously regenerate, nimble as an ice-walking fox in a blasted landscape. It will care for itself. I fall back like an exhausted lover, spent and famished. I am a cactus tree, full and hollow. I am one.

#1, 2, 3,4, first appeared in Upstairs at Duroc (France).

#5,6,7 first appeared in OCHO #9.

Several others first appeared in Otoliths Magazine, Simone Muench's Sharkforum, and the fourWeighteen print anthology from Charles Stuart University in Australia.

A portion of the book is also available to be listened to on PennSound.

First print edition of Opera Bufo: Otoliths, 2007.

Many thanks to Mary Harju, Susan Wallack, Larry Eisman, Steve Halle, Bill Allegrezza, Anny Ballardini, all my poetry friends everywhere, and a special thanks to Eric Baus and Noah Eli Gordon for teaching me what prose poems can do.

Laura Goldstein on *Opera Bufo: moria* (2008)

I was very fortunate to pick up a copy of *Opera Bufo* when I did. I went to see Andrew Lundwall and Daniela Olszewska read at Myopic books and was browsing the authors-who-have-been-here shelf before it started. I went upstairs and sat down. Andrew was late; he lives an hour or so outside of town. I started reading.

I don't know too much about opera, but I think that it would be a lovely experience in the spring, as is Adam's book, as is going to a good poetry reading, which is what I meant that I was fortunate to pick up a copy, right now, especially, when the spring is creeping in and melting up a bit of winter's hard and coldness. The book had some kind of similar effect on me, like music, as it is music, as it really is, and as it also uses as its larger metaphor.

The themes start and they start to mix. The way that they mix is the first part of the opera, a part which is sustained for a very large portion of the poem; so long, in fact, that I thought that was what the whole poem would be like. But it did change, and I very much appreciated that. I imagine that operas change partway through. I know our lives do. Adam writes, "as if you were a cup of finished ice-cream, I'd be a brown-eyed moon goddess"(11). Is this a good time to mention that I told Andrew after the reading that my favorite line of his was, "I want to eat some ice cream. I want to fuck my face with vanilla. Seems like it." Adam mentions right off that the rhythms are pitiless because we do not know how they began and this is a good example: "Rhythms become streams of possible shoe-lace, slugs of 3 a.m. Scotch, lust after thy neighbor's daughter, mooning on the lawn"(7) and later "You become gum"(36).

Adam latches onto rhythms that are already at play in the world and sifts into them his mix of observation, word play, conjecture, description, subversion and other games of linguistic and logic, testing out our frames of reference. Many sentences land themselves in a music of metaphor that made me keep wanting more. In this weird time of wanting to start a book that I see wing past my window on Goodreads or having guilt about setting one aside that I've already committed to publicly, it was just an absolute joy to want to keep reading and reading until I was finished. And, though I hate to admit this for fear that it reveals something about my attention span, this is rare.

Also related to spring, I felt very fortunate to be reading about so many actions that are happening outside from section to section, so much grass and color and even running along the Schuylkill, which makes me miss Philly in the springtime, too. In terms of the balance that Adam's creating in the book from section to section, he's bringing in a real record of the outside world to pour into his metaphors. This is not only a great springtime thing to think about, but also an important poetic for getting the poet outside of themselves. It was riveting to watch Adam's real-time reactions as he wrote the world into the opera, which must ultimately be sung with a voice.

Well what do I want to say about the end of the opera. The opera begins to end and then it begins to know it is ending and then it is ending and then it ends. At one point, at the very beginning of the ending as I saw it, Adam writes, "I only knew two scales, and I played them every which way"(44) and then he writes, "I saw a thousand hues, and each was differently

used" (49) and how can they both be true? Well they are in this opera. In the first statement, he admits that his initial range might seem limited, but in the next he shows that what he observes in the world is much more multiple. Although a bounded being, external experience is what, looking back to the first statement, allows him to create real complexity with his writing. A writer has only so many words but each encounter is new and provides new materials, new ideas, and new combinations of thoughts and words. There's an attention that Adam is drawing to this paradox of language that poetry permeates as he draws his opera to a close. Perhaps one of the things about opera is that it transmits a vital energy; besides its mimetic purpose as theater, large swells of sound are projected with so much skill into the confined space of the hall. Within *Opera Bufo*, there is real life stirring inside the language as it finds a climax out of the constraints of its own conjuring.

I finished *Opera Bufo* while I was getting my hair cut, another spring thing, getting rid of the heavy mess of growth on my head that had gotten out of control over the winter. Now I feel lighter. I guess that when it's time to finish a book of really fine poetry, "it is the hour of feeling, when singing must cease" (59). Adam writes, "If only I felt that life, concentrated into song, could be fruit juice for thirsty joggers. Alas, it is not so" (62). Well, maybe I'm in an especially optimistic mood right now, but I disagree.

Stacy Blair on Opera Bufo: Stoning the Devil (2008) (written for Laura Goldstein's poetry class at Loyola University Chicago)

Opera Bufo: "Divertimento Giocosso" or Coping with Absence?

Time, as a linear construction, tends to herd people into viewing their lives in terms of memory, present sensual stimulation, and hypothetical premonitions. The English language reflects this structure by allowing us to speak in various verbal tenses, and narratives that employ multiple temporal settings can transport the reader or auditor into emotional states contingent upon a temporal location designated by the author. We construct our perceptions of the world based not only on language, however but also on images that elicit emotional responses and generate new thoughts or ideas. Memory works in a similar way, by cataloguing images corresponding to one's emotional and physical state in the past, like a physical stamp on one's brain that tries, then, to translate it into words. Memory, which can take such a strong hold on one's perception, depends upon loss for its own creation, such that one must lose something in order to look back on it in memory. Poets have long been tackling the problem of forgetting and memory, coping with grief, mourning lost lovers or friends, and feeling out the concept of nostalgia through their work. In *Opera Bufo*, Adam Fieled builds an entire opera out of prose poems, weaving through it themes of sex, music, literature, and drugs, all of which become threads that attempt to explore this concept. His emotional release onto the page is a highly poetic form reduced to potent and poignant prose that describes losing as a means of artistic creation.

Throughout Fieled's opera, he remembers past lovers and the loss of physical objects, but he continually highlights the arbitrariness of the "what" that is gone, profiting from a focus on the expression engendered by absence. After all, the first line of his poetic musical score reads, "Losing is the lugubriousness of Chopin." (5) By equating "losing" with an interpretation of Chopin's style he transforms the concept of absence into the great work of an infamous composer in six words. Fieled underscores the importance of what comes from the emotional reaction caused by deprivation rather than the object or feeling originally lost: "It is simply bereavement that leads us here, to these images." (16) Loss engenders these "images" that eventually lead to new thought, creating inventive juxtapositions and fresh concepts. He goes even further by drawing attention to his own creative process and his reconfiguration of mourning when he says,

What has been lost thus far? It's just tar on a highway, bound for ocean. Or, it's the migratory flight of a carrier pigeon. It is all things that move and breathe, coalesced into sound...It is octaves, repeated in a funhouse mirror until a decibel level is reached that a dog alone may hear. I am the dog that hears, the dog that conducts, the dog that puts bones on the table. (50)

In this citation, the poet refers to himself as the *ramasseur* of the fragmented pieces created by loss. He "conducts" the broken pieces into poetry to be put onto the table for the public to digest.

Furthermore, Fieled directly mentions memory, saying that it is "as sweet as reality" (59) and then relates the two of these to dreams. This statement disregards any difference between

the past and the present in terms of experience and one's emotional state. His comparison to dreams, then, links them all together through their capacity to provoke strong emotional experiences and vivid imagery. However, he separates the dream world from the others by saying, "I have learned to what extent dreams are real. They may not be solid as a cast-iron pot, but they are enough." (59) But *enough* for what exactly? Here Fieled suggests that dreams suffice as inspiration for artistic expression. A few, short lines after, he sums up this theory of creation in stating, "It is the hour of feeling, when singing must cease." (59) Here, "the hour of feeling" refers to the present, profiting from the woman he finds himself next to in order to experience the moment as the present. However, as he states himself, these privileged instances of living in the present moment exclude the possibility of creative release; during these moments, "singing must cease." In one of his other poems in which he references the power of imagination, he says, "I know that I had to dream an opera to really sing. I know I had to dream singing to really write." (54) The poet's creativity cultivated in this dream world derives directly from the concept of losing control. Once his subconscious eliminates all barriers constructed by reason or rationality, Fieled really starts to sing.

Opera Bufo bulges at the seams with drug references to describe an elimination of control. Cocaine and mescaline dispossess users of their governance over their own visual faculties, causing hallucinations and amplifying all external stimuli. This state of being induced by drugs parallels the dream state that Fieled exploits for tapping into new creativity. Drugs, however, grant extended access to this alternative existence in which one's subconscious yields to consciousness, whereas the dreamer forgoes all control involuntarily. Fieled references the prevalent drug culture of the psychedelic rock scene in San Francisco during the 1960's and 70's to infuse his poetry with this theme: "stay where shadows press themselves in upon you. Stay with the purple riders and their sage buttons." (16) This is the first drug allusion of *Opera Bufo*, and boldly opens the doors for others to follow. His mention of "purple riders" adorned with "sage buttons" points directly to the band New Riders of the Purple Sage, a country rock band that emerged from this drug and music culture of California in 1969. The term "purple riders" describes users of a mildly hallucinogenic aromatic herb found in Southern California commonly used in Native American ceremonies. Though Fieled makes this insinuation early on in his work, he picks up the thread again towards the end when Maria Callas says to him, "We are all purple riders" as she slowly exhales a ribbon of smoke. Though the author also mentions the use of cocaine, this theme of hallucinogenic drugs is more tightly weaved into his story as he openly associates it with Maria Callas, one of the narrator's inspirations, his former lover, and the woman who performs his *Opera Bufo*.

In addition, the poet dissolves boundaries signifying binary opposition to destroy conventional associations and meaning. Many images created by Fieled seem cryptic, and the reader must often wrestle the sentence into some sort of submission from which he or she can draw any digestible meaning. For example, he says things such as, "The history of popcorn is a minor third that can be squelched by intense bed-thuds," (31) or "keep your pug-face for the aesthete tax collecting slobber-heads." (28) He also tests one's logic by using such hypothetical reasoning as, "If you were a cup of finished ice cream, I'd be a brown-eyed moon-goddess." (11) These lines disorient the reader and also reflect on Fieled's own state of mind during the creation process. In describing his own style, Fieled says, "As for fluorescence, those crayons were always my favorites anyway. If the color is off, it's because

my set collapsed, if not into nullity, then into plurality.” (54) He tears down the blatant contrasts separating nullity from plurality and life from death to create a space in between, seemingly void of sense and control, from which poetry and song spring forth in abundance. He says that “song cannot be spared when life and death adhere,” (56) and it is within this grey space that Fieled writes. Inside this space, in which everything seems arbitrary and undeterminable, people create new connections between words and images, create new meaning, and better understand themselves.

In losing control and sacrificing reason, Fieled actually *gains* control over his own creative style and the structure of his work. The opening sentence in which he mentions Chopin establishes the poet’s theme and perspective that he will tease out during the fifty-nine poems to follow. He relies heavily on the concept of absence and its multiple contributions to the creative process in the first quarter of his opera before he enters into other themes. In his first poem, Fieled says,

What’s lost might be a sea shell or a tea cup or the bloody scalp of an Indian; it hardly matters. When you are lost, the heart recedes from exterior currents, too much in sync with itself, its groove vicissitudes. Each encounter, rather than revealing new rhythms, is experienced as a clangorous din, a pounding...to push the heart deeper and deeper into pitiless darkness...We squirm within ourselves to the sound of the Devil’s opera bufa. (5)

He disregards what sends him into this “pitiless darkness” to focus on the experience he lives once there. Fieled plants the seed of an idea that should slowly blossom in the reader’s mind through their experience with his work and returns to the original concept in his final poems. Eight poems from the end, he begins an “inventory” of what is lost, of what remains, and of what has been gained. A few poems before that, he says, “What has been lost thus far? It’s just tar on a highway, bound for ocean,” (50) lines that provide deeper reflection upon an idea that was similarly stated in the first lines of his work. In using this structure, Fieled has created a strong thematic foundation that circles back on itself, and he fills the middle with layers of relevant ideas, juxtaposed colors and images, and a stylized imagery presented in a simple, yet very rich and highly poetic style.

Opera Bufa outlines Adam Fieled’s digestion of loss and memory that leads him into the grey space between nullity and plurality from which creation is born. His poetry explores hallucinogenic drugs, sexual promiscuity, and cryptic language play to cope with absence in a positive way. It is his artistic creation, his opera, his voice, his poetry; it is music that bleeds.

II. BEAMS

Preface

As I have discussed at length elsewhere, 2005 was a hectic, tumultuous time for me. On a bunch of different circuits (including the Philly bar scene and the art scene, which in the Aughts were first cousins), the Philly Free School was a fire set loose. My writing life wasn't (couldn't be) terribly disciplined at the time—though I had written Wittgenstein's Song in April at the Last Drop, and debuted it in New England. My spring M.F.A. semester was nonetheless a personal milestone; through Anne Waldman, I became steeped in nouveau poetry and the avant-garde; and my piece (written for Anne) Wordsworth @ McDonald's came out in Jacket #28 in April, too. Being younger than thirty and in Jacket Magazine was part of my wild ride then. Aided and abetted by the success of Poetry Incarnation '05, I was feeling cocky, and puckish. An explosive time to be in Philly.

It was in character for me in 2005 to believe I could create a valuable poetic form out of thin air. In truth, the eponymous section of Beams I wrote at that time is not a substantial formal breakthrough; what I call the "Beam" form isn't that unique or striking. The poems have more strength in their thematic gist than in their formal inventiveness—lots of twisted, warped sexuality, precursor to the When You Bit... sonnets and the Madame Psychosis poems, written a year later. It wasn't a stretch for me to be warped about sexuality in mid-Aughts Philadelphia, or New York, where Mike Land's sister Anna lived in the East Village. The Madame Psychosis poems of '06 were formally and thematically more self-conscious; partly because I was trying to be painterly (in the manner of Kooning and his Women), partly because the formal imperative was to compress (in the manner of Keats), partly because I'd been perverted by a period of promiscuity, and knew it. Many of the best Madame Psychosis poems were written in New England; debbie jaffe was written in Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia. I lifted the title of the series from Foster Wallace's Infinite Jest, which I read at that time, with Nick Gruberg's encouragement, and which was animated by a similar twistedness. Even if Becky Grace inverts the Madame Psychosis archetype.

One of my odd discoveries then was that a huge puritanical streak ran through avant-garde poetry in America. One female editor, in particular, castigated my pervishness in a memorable way, by laying down a gauntlet—if she was going to publish me, it had to be something more abstract or impressionistic, and not so sexualized. I wrote the original Apparition Poems (which later mutated in a more expansive direction) for her—some of them wound up coming out, also, in Jacket #31, and in a Lake Forest College Press anthology. As Beams was being written, my life tightened and became more focused—I finished my M.F.A., started as a University Fellow at Temple, and the Free School ceased to function as a cohesive entity. The Virtual Pinball poems, co-written with Swedish poet Lars Palm, were a kind of last hurrah for the profligate Free School period—written in an arbitrary, haphazard manner, often from whatever I happened to be listening to on the radio. By October '06, I had compiled the Beams manuscript of the four series and sent it to Blazevox. It came out as a Blazevox e-book a year later.

Beams is as close as I've come to publishing something representatively post-modern—a book which prizes quirk, anomaly, and disjuncture over depth

and intellect. If I had to move past it instantly, it is because I found the strictures of post-modern verse too limiting. There's too much human reality which can't be expressed with quirk and anomaly; and too much ephemerality in the post-modern approach for a disciple of British Romanticism to accept or embrace (even if UK poet Jeffrey Side connected Beams with Blake in his '08 GR review of the book). If Beams has a claim to some enduring importance, it is because I dared to tackle a serious theme (human sexuality) in a few novel ways, and without unduly obfuscating what the theme was.

Adam Fieled, 2013

Publication Credits

Now Awards Anthology (Lake Forest College Press)- "Apparition Poems"

The Argotist— "café"

Blazevox— "Call", "Legs", "Loose Canon"

Cricket Online Review— "Sarah Israel"

Dusie— "Apparition Poems"

Eratio Postmodern Poetry— "Helen Lee"

Jacket Magazine— "Apparition Poems"

Mipoesias— "this is a song (about how I'm a monkey)",
"isla perdida", "virtual pinball"

Nth Position— "debbie jaffe"

Ocho #6— "creep"

Otoliths— "Apparition Poems"

Words Dance— "sex hex", "solipsist"

Beams has been taught at Wofford College in South Carolina. A print edition of Beams was published by Human Touch out of Miami, Florida, in 2012.

I. Beams

creep

i'm inclined to play creep w/ a bagel

off-white dough gets kneaded
black-shirted blue-jeaned green-horns

indented floors absorb sponge-light
looks for line-riches, coffee-crucial cafés

leg strokes render you from his palm
in paisley like an Oregon farmer

ploughs couldn't be more shared
as you leave me, hardly, knock-kneed

razor

what perspective I have is slanted
edged like needle-scars along arm-veins
everything I can't puncture is there

now "surprise" means you come back
pointed to a blade, I call you razor

as if fingers could untwine fish-eyes
nails take off layers of anodyne

bottoms grow hardened from rubs
& sharpness be a baby's candy

Sex hex

If she's skittish, don't skip her

you might just be a ball of yarn
unraveled beneath her nails

or a bagged mind-fuck
leaving her careening, ecstatic

nothing wrong w/ a little push

take her up, stroke her belly
she'll think of Foucault

& possibly let you construct her

solipsist

are you serious, fucking

bent over bars, malt heavens
bubbles bumping bed-posts, breakage

sweating mug, street-lake sea-shells
last night around yr waist

you're knotted, not what you did
pressed to the city's dry ice

deep down the throat of a solipsist

café

napkin-neat café decomposition

poster-plastered walls represent fresh being
repetitious modes of sensual self-sacrifice

not recoverable by any stub-cottony means
lightning track-lighting long-swallow lit-smoke

my grey-guts spattered on a table

unstructured strength it could be, cherry-red cowardice
parallel shadows unplaced by any given

finally flight is taken from time's impossibility
for solid substance, death's lettuce-deluge

self-naming can't be where this winds up

Leaves

Leaves tonight are leaning
spots of light inside inside-ness

then when you pause a moment
wade in Poseidon's fountain

cherish the night's totality
leaves become ground

for christening

Infinite Regress

Modigliani-marvelous
you collapsed perspectives

“vessel” in torso-line, reflected
back, over your shoulder

you leapt from the frame
colors in you remained canvas

fore-grounded dimensions

Silk

if I could fashion a fashion from fashion

your fabric fluttered over my chest
styled slacks pressed the length of Chelsea

shapely shadows arrayed over cheekbones
shutters would close on our revelations

hair askew, damp in rouge-red blood-flow

a fashion past the lips of limitation
defined not to distinguish or over-vogue

but to green silk that had been dusky
and to tease out each stark blue

behind eye-lined, sky-lined walls of rigidity

Loose Canon

shots ricocheted at borders

coated walls absorbed friction-lit brigades
sensitive machines registered red hits

sleep fell on specifics regardless
universals fried sausages

not much could be spoken of remorse

second skirmish sent forces scattering
shards of green glass littered forest floors

irreplaceable antiques wiped their eyes
on the cuffs of the loosest canon

I didn't expect immolation to arrive so soon

Legs

senseless propositions

seem ruddy-cheeked in sky-backed night
exhaust-fume dense from windowless space

you're black-hewn then, from spider-webbed heat
(rubbed, boned over propulsions)

clouded lights prove unstable, shoot themselves off
damp felt ends of feeling...

a state of affairs untouched by contraction
simulacrum of finite regression

puddles and spoon-handles confuse themselves

emmie

dreams are irrevocably dreamt

much “noticing” goes on
& metaphors are like similes

you remain gravy-wakeful
I remain carving this air-turkey

“too cornered,” street between

slipper-shod graces, facts;
uncles, ex-cranberries;

i can't carve a relation

ex

mimesis of no-détente

(m)oral play of difference
I follow breath to be

as a blue painted vase
El Greco-sepia room

crossed corrugated lips

regrets of rinsed locusts
you “just knew” this

would happen, as you

“just knew” it’d happen
when you painted me

Whiskey

Balance, easily sought, is hardly attained;
no sooner are we aloft than we're

buried beneath snow-drifts; grace follows damn-
nation, damnation follows grace, & whiskey

soaked evenings are always a possibility.
In fact, it's here that Li Po forged

whatever stealth was his, in the first buzz
of drunkenness. I follow him, rattled, jarred,

& stymied by the world's cries, & my own,
& soon I sit amid piles on both sides—

exultations, horrors, amassed like so many
stamps, low-priced, out of date.

Drip

I've received, refused one invitation into Middle America.
Her body was a cornfield, that's true. Everything in it

was ripe. She engraved the invitation on my bed,
mixed it into my drinks, taped it on the fridge.

It hovered between us like a mist, soon grew monstrous.
Shit or get off the pot, she said. *Get while the getting's*

good. I was lost in the green rows of her skin. I was
afraid of the Middle, it's ice-creamy easiness. It dripped.

By autumn, I blew it. The harvest moon shone on stubs.
The pissed Middle swore to evade me forever. I don't miss it.

Blog

every post you post is posted post-haste

succor-seeking cocks in your hand and mouth
seminal urges baffle you like nitrous

chin-dribble takes back-space from your keyboard
one hand pumps page-down, one inserts

shift mixes drivel and nut-sack sweat

I take tabs, control, alter, delete,
sans cock-lock, escape-ready, home-truth entered

your print inscribes epithets on my X-key
at an outpost, post-modernity betrayed

by your complete lack of question marks

Pay

Summer's leaving, it's plague time.
Penny-parted cogs scrape, blare, cut & swear.

Voices stay wall-stuck, slashed between
poppy-dog chains. I've got purple before me.

It's like a hunger-chiseled face. I pay
& pay; smoked heads flung into grimace,

I'm grimaced beneath smoke, oven-churned.
She's cigarettes, restless, side-walked.

Excess weight pinches finely-nerved necks;
mauve sky's a bared torso, an "if";

I could chunder, that's certain.

ladder

stepped leaning ladders perched

like an easy-won confession
“lover” is harder than it is easy

you of all people know this
paleness deployed in guerrilla

lipstick attacks, Princess Leia

bangs coming down rungs
don't walk under the trestles

I climb sideways into paint-cans

II. APPARITION POEMS

#3

petals on a

bed you made,

against

ocean's breakers

#27

not across, not down

emptied, always grey
such is this stuff

such is a hat's convalescence

#14

through a door
genuine article
three geezers
many nods

pink Buddha

#23

how sky, clods in it,
seems a near-melt,
a blue-grey omelette;

traipsing brick surfaces

#17

three red flags, each winnowed
around multi-colored stones,
is how I've been hit,

how I've been gutted

#19

stick to

her blackness,

you'll find

moving stripes

#42

feet tap linoleum,

shadow-play rhythm;

not to be dogged,

nerves infra-reddened

#45

“in order to”

lose those blueberry shackles

“fight hegemony”

in moose-like context

I don't know how to

#36

after all

everything

you're still

thinking

ochre-tinted

#61

never you worry

honey

on the table

money

#80

I rev clean across

I'm paved
I'm rolling in moss
I save

#87

windows up

higher

look through

into great wide opus

#89

o it's drab
outside the trees

really only me
I see there

#91

"I have
eaten no
plums"
is what
I told
the trope-
police

#85

not to be mistaken
not to be messed with
not to be forsaken
only to be blessed with

how it must be on Jupiter

#75

sun is there
not here

anyway
the bed's made

#70

here, look,
coffee in a cup
wouldn't you
just know
I creamed it?

#50

she
seems
to be

up

at me

#52

conflate
two leaves
two ideas
with veins

don't bark

#54

off, into rivers
currently
where you be

#100

art in "say"
art in "do"

art

pass the ketchup

#105

cut short,
pumpkin,
but that's
alright, as
I feel cut
also, by
short kin,
smashed.

#150

last September cricket
leaf falls on him

#162

no room for thought
glare on potted plants

flawlessly dumbstruck

#163

your face
beige wall
it's pictured

not that I
can reach

#168

maybe I'll
get broken

in Hoboken

I'm joking

#169

you'll see
it's urban
as grease,

breaths I

take in a
rush like
this, this

#170

éclaircs conspire
all in a line

I'm hungry

for them to
be written

#195

ordinary hull
of a tight wad
ship
shop
stop

#200

my hands measure
hyena arousal
as my mouth laughs

my my

#201

“a dream of form
in days of thought”

the thought formed

& it was a dream

#203

Who watches as antlers
convolute themselves?

O dear

#131

she in blue
out the door

cross

in the street
red light

#132

at this time
you're there
but you won't
remain, can't

after all, it's
dear, staying

#136

Pollock's rhythm

took him up
maybe too far

as to where we are

#137

to walk

is expressive

of having legs

ad infinitum

#120

unlikely thighs
put upon a page
white, long, lined
can't complain

#121

what do I know
what does "last" mean
"last" is not "lost"
purple frame, clear door.

#124

when a head tilts
round eyes, snap

III. MADAME PSYCHOSIS

Sarah Israel

Memory wears white tee-shirts, is blue-eyed,
that I "remember" her.
This new kind of "I" passes fourth-grade notes,
says "I like you" to her.
It trailed off in her swimming pool.
She was so spiteful.
That "I" remember "her" is a kind of joke,
but we did dance at Bar Mitzvahs.
And some of them were slow.
And some ended in other things.
Call this an aesthetic of Tantalus.
Tantalus was overeager in English class;
a "he" in "she" seen by me.
I heard of her exploits later.
"She's so totally after him."
"You don't have to strip to tease".
I saw her in a seeing not seen by any eye,
& the "I" that saw, saw my eye not at all.

helen lee

you said (it was a way of saying)
hold me, touch, kiss. vagaries of
bliss, explosive, like, lemons. like
“like”. reach behind, “blind”. i’m,
progressing, make. miner, key,
brooding. expressive of the sole’s
rubber. only a lamp through wind
clarities. (not a, not, a, formula).

changing lit’s lace. how fetching,
fowl. red, buttons, noticed, before,
she, came. not tender, tenderly
rendered, heart-rending lee “deus
ex machine-esque”— “like glory”

Dawn Ananda

clanders to clutch things in a snake-like grip;
model-trim belly, w/ just the vaguest fat-hint
towards hip-ends, is often bared in dancing;

hair, italian brunette, irish straight, gets caught
in her mouth when a harsh caress tenses her;
ass, perfect median meager-voluptuous, will

raise itself when she chooses a favorite CD;
neck, african-elongated, porcelain-pure, frightens
in the extreme refinement of its' delicacy;

legs, edible swizzle-sticks & gazelle-gorgeous,
become erratic after three or four drinks;
tongue, volatile entity-in-itself, is bellwether

of nothing whatsoever but what the strokes are up to

lizzie mclean

was all pot roast. hope:
that I can't hold, doll.
for you write, wrong. big.
bold. ass, a nine-volt shite.
"boners were tulips", yes,
butt, I never, have never,
buttered heads, as such,
w/ you. it's all weary
simper. I, conned, take,
your, "can't".

Paula

chaos, order, clipped bird-like into
wings & cries. i could only ever
think: paula. all the thrusts &
pumps that could never be. "all"
that must be withheld, & that
it might be better that way.

you gave me the gift: savoring
wanting. how it really was you
i wanted. not a body but a soul.
i tell myself i've "been through
you", forever & never. zero here,
same as two. empty. saturated. dark.

eye eye eye

nile-wide, eye eye eye.
a sylph, bee low my buzz.
it wants, to do, at mouth.
no. not every one. can end,
dare-a-licked, like is. or:
put it, porn again. dew wit
like its done, on, cyber.
space, opened, bee twain. no,
went in sight. tight tight.

debbie jaffe

& that i must caesar. arms, curd
went down. found, mice, shelf, armor
machine. wasp it up, & up, & up, real
member a machine. then, head, shot,
“she said”, she said. feel, linger, can’t.
belly, caesar, belly. debit, giraffe, red-
headed. purge to null, urge, two, pull.
eye, belly, belie. ()

lucy stingle

yr back's back in back. black.
fingers ride cheeks like sea-foam.
soft cut of a hard look. tow-
headed horse's ass pony-tail.
rather a strong black-strapped sit.
quick tongue-dart like plane's
blinking beacon. now I'm "back",
or you're fronting. easy trick. Rote
gimmick. gerund: "gallivanting".
meaning: to parade, wantonly.
I'll, we'll, give it "back". easy. still black.

Debra Harnigan

Noting/ cheekbone sluice/ china veneer
Impulses/ bathroom stalls/ naughtiness
I'm in on it/ gentle as anesthesia/ drops
Disrupt/ retrograde attitude/ mercurial
Your middle/ leaned up/ lifting belly
Your bottom/ budging metal/ melting
In-drip/ innards ingrown/ warm war

& then the how the went the into the flush

Becky Grace

It's woven into her, that polo shirt. She might even fuck w/ it. Not "we", post-we or sub-we, but just "pseudo", "quasi", "ersatz". Nothing w/ "self" in it; nothing implying discrete boundaries. Becky isn't bounded, or has boundlessness woven into her...

Polo shirts are what they are, remain so. If I say "objective correlative", I bring string into it, so that Becky might be strung up. I don't deny a "literal" element, or that Becky might stay in. All I mean is, between "us", there's "more-than-us". That's what I'm "getting at"; it's woven into me

IV. VIRTUAL PINBALL (with Lars Palm)

Isla Perdida (Lars, w/ Adam)

somewhere between summer &
eternity anesthesiologists
wonder, where, the whitewash, went.
There is certainly need enough
for that, they further, muse. In
wee hours of morning he claims to
speak seven languages; says one of the
municipal buses, runs, to a place called

isla perdida which may be where the
horror writers sit & type all day or
maybe in some, instances (insomniac
anyone?), night-watched.
& somewhere between lairs of
the liars that be, a little, while, longer

un-blown (now go & sin) (Lars, w/ Adam)

a popular poplar parties
w/ pre-menstrual princesses—
that's blues for you.
i shall over-churn that cop car.
though, i'm, no occupational. or force,
just a kid, with, shorts, & a
slingshot. there's lost. of fun
to be had w/ one of toes. god
nose, hose down those
who got bruised, by, the news.

or those used cars w/ broken brakes
so poplar among third-rate
pop-shears for reasons, un-blown.
by the application of solid air-ity
banks to issue interest-free
loans to make it easier to start
businesses in, precarious, areas.
or a tuna sandwich,
which is what he needs before
he heeds the ball to charms. arms

race through the face of a
shitting sun. one. or more, who's
keeping score? sore boards
bored pirate-ships w/ swaying
hips to counterbalance the rocking
& rolling of the waves singing
that old song by queen. bohemian
rap-sodden mean, no, mean, feat, by,
their talk of lye. to fit right in. now go & sin

this is a song (about how I'm a monkey) (Adam, w/ Lars)

“what about, uh, what about a guy w/ an attitude?”

“oh yeah, we got guys like that”

I had problems;

I was arrested for jay-walking in Los Angeles;

I felt, OK, this was this type of character,
in fact

I met people that were just trying to make a living
paradox;

“for thirty years you walk side by side, overnight

lose everything, but not once do you blame

people, so people like yourself can reap the...”

filtered through my own perspective, hate-mail, a story...

“I'm a big fan of close-ups”, interested in the human
face, there were some beautiful, like, crane-shots,

I mean, obviously, the greatest location of the human
face, the eyes, the soul of the character,

“I feel it but I don't pay it any mind”

Dick Cheney's Brain (Adam, w/ Lars)

Dick Cheney's brain— it's, a, kneel,
right-male. Spend four days, figuring,
poor, pabulum. Never get the image out
of his mammary. Fox news knocks fuse,
few, fugue, death-mew. Pleasure or
virtue, which would you blues?
Increasingly cloudy morning highs
falling, though. Will satellite beer,
round, mud, schlonger? Respect-
shun was none too wood, board

crisis, moon. The hip-hop revolution
has, taken, plays— ubu boos you. That
doesn't mean the strategy is long
run day one. Holding on to fewer &
fewer trial, investors, wondering.
Serious is set to announce it's big,
also, general, motors. Could be
forced to already analysts push
chapter eleven. Chick, dainty, s'brain—
it promised to back away from that.
Promise making a settlement likely

(don't wanna be nobody's) hero (Lars, w/ Adam)

“should we not have been here before? were
we not here before?” what do you mean
by "here" & "before"? is this a dead
end? & why should that matter, he
asks himself, & the walls, the sun. it
wasn't me who last saw him alive.

i think

it was that man in the checkered suit,
you know who i mean; the one who
always sings the songs nobody
remembers— he sings them well, i'll
give him that. one of them seems to be a
hymn to the rising tide. oh, & while we're
at it, what do you mean by "been"?

unless i

spelled that wrong & you're
just hungry, not strangely curious
about a dead man who (i think) will
remain where he is...

Debt (Adam, w/ Lars)

"you've got a radical
extension of debt; it
is being noticed; you
can find an excerpt in
hunger here at home

focus on the fact that
he's a dwarf, falling
through the Earth; with
out a written language,
feels shut out"

in the trial, lasting however-
many months, fate in
hands, "they already had
one", it's called theology

hat's a life-span, a
life-style; not the kind
of family (though heavens
may fall) the governments
talk about

they can become show-men,
that's (kind of) what they
do; the job was, "done"

hell in (Adam, w/ Lars)

there's a "she" across
the street
who cooks
butternut squash soup
an "I" & a "he"

One really wonders

Sometimes she's seen
in the window
stroking her pussy

It could jump
out the window
nothing would change

Twenty feet of air
divides "us".

She could be painted
abstractly

I've done it.

Rhythmic brush-strokes
swirling pink
for her pussy

He hung it
he's hung

I hung around
eating her
butternut squash

What kind of
composition is
this?

the love of hopeless cusses (Lars, w/ Adam)

what's there to wonder about? it's all,
very, simple. There's a man across the
street from her, on the floor above, who
employs whores, she's apparently trying to
provoke him into doing something
obscene-- that shouldn't be too hard. What's
there to chunder about? there is, as in
all major cities, a housing shortage, & it's
solved not by those who should & could
solve it, but by those who need to, in any,
way, they can. What's there to blunder
about? enough of this, then. i think i'll go
fondle some imponderable side-streets.....

Virtual Pinball (Adam, w/ Lars)

I don't mind you mining
for cheap, Google hits, it's
par, for, the, purse. "just give
me, my chair,
get me out of
my, hair". parse sparse blog-
hogs. leave, a trail of,
hosts— no metaphor.

this ain't no Moulin Rouge. or,
you know how I read, it's cool
w/ me. (I was Di's
favorite waste of time)(I'm
embedding a god-damned
narrative, OK?) "one is over
there, one's over here, it works."

Bertold Brecht,
Nicanor Parra,
Jimmy Page,
Yossarian,
Hans Castorp,
Rumi (abused by translator),
Hmphr Bgrt.

Di's (I've never
seen) right there. We
snuck in her back
door, you can fake
cough— we declare an
era of

virtual (fucking) pinball

body count (Lars, w/ Adam)

count one. one of montechristo. who didn't have the strange hobby of draping whole islands in plastic, or whatever, cloth. clothing, some say, should suit the weather. whether the body counts or not, the same some don't say. you don't say. surely madam, you jest. a runaway breast? here, on this street? no wonder all the drivers leaned so heavily on their horns. "sagawa chika". the last light of the day, normally a deep blue, turned green. & then yellow. that's when the birds took flight in a hurry. to beat the red they all thought was next

count two. won't say where, so let's keep with the math. but this is easy. we're just adding one. one what? oh, i don't know. word. thought. political assassination. or attempt at. silly monologue. house perched on mountain side. "alejandra pizarnik". there was only one. that's quite enough, thank you & don't forget the fish. you did after all bore it into biting your hook. that was rather impressive. watching mount st helens explode

count three. we appear also to be subtracting one. line, that is. was it lime we would be hard pressed to make an even half decent "margin-eater". why ever we would want to do that. "joan brossa". there is still so much fun to be made of things. & the finger of god blew off in the storm last fall. maybe, just maybe, there is something we could learn from that

count four. score & more. sure. a pure pleasure. after those 95 minutes of headless headmasters, witless witnesses & you name it. "philip whalen". barking back at dogs. laughing with happy chinaman after stealing his sack of candy which, he knows, were poems. posted on fence posts (?)

look a tail

today's worst news
run over twice by cops
& the sweet animal rights
activist didn't have
time to save me

there's bound to be a
cat in here somewhere
unbound, hopefully, like
that creature called
"curiosity" pawing around

killing them by the
thousands or that
wisdom they're supposedly
possessed by.....

Today's best news--
a ham & cheese sandwich

Jeffrey Side on “Beams”: Galatea Resurrects (2008)

Beams by Adam Fieled is an e-book from Blazevox. It is a multifaceted work that is both formally and typographically inventive, as well as being linguistically intriguing. To do full justice to the poetry in this volume would require a much longer and detailed review of essay length; such is the complexity and multifaceted nature of this work. So all I will attempt in this review is to isolate certain features that can be readily recognized.

Beams comprises four titled sections: ‘Beams’, ‘Apparition Poems’, ‘Madame Psychoses’, and ‘Virtual Pinball’ (this latter being composed with poet Lars Palm). Each of these sections contain poems stylistically different to those of the other sections. An important aspect to the ‘Beams’ section is Fieled’s poetic aesthetic regarding it. The poems in it represent his concept of the poetic “beam”. The following is an extract from his exposition of this poetic, which can be read at <http://artrecess2.blogspot.com/2005/08/beam-hypothesis.html>:

[A beam is] a short poem, 8-20 lines [not] necessarily impersonal or personal, but it must transcend mere subjectivity [...] single lines interspersed function as “beams of light”. They’re pure shots into poetic space, flashes of imagery, insight, gist-phrasing, etc. Light-beams illuminate built-beams [ie architectural structures], built-beams support and buttress light-beams. Together, they posit the BEAM as a kind of “light-house” or “light-structure.”

The manifestation of this poetic aesthetic in the ‘Beams’ section applies to all of its poems, but other aspects tangentially related also pertain, particularly where colour (light) and matter (objects) are made to amalgamate in such a way as to produce an almost iridescent affect which draws attention to the “variability” that underlies phenomena (according to quantum theory). The aesthetic result is that material objects are seen to display less than palpable qualities: light becomes semi-palpable in ‘Creep’ (p.7) were it is described as ‘Sponge-light’, and in ‘Leaves’ (p.12) matter becomes semi-iridescent:

Leaves tonight are leaning
spots of light [...]

The use of such affects serves to give us a sense of the underlying subatomic volatility that forms the objects of the observed world. It has a sort of Blakean sense whereby the visible world is seen to envelop a subtler one. The world is not all it seems to be. In doing this with words, Fieled makes almost tangible to our senses what can but remain only rational inference if we are reliant on same from a study of quantum physics. No small achievement for a poet.

However, the poems are not limited to such affects. They also manage to concisely represent the vicissitudes of human experience in all their variations. In ‘Razor’ (p.8) we find lines such as,

edged like needle-scars along arm-veins
everything I can’t puncture is there

which in association with the lines,

bottoms grow hardened from rubs
& sharpness be a baby's candy

not only produce an interesting juxtaposition, but also represent birth and death. They suggest the bitterness, regret, and frustration that is the lot of humanity, yet they also suggest hope in that we become hardened in order for that suffering to become almost as acceptable to us as candy is to a baby.

Throughout this collection, a recurring motif relating to sexual struggle is evident. In 'Sex Hex' (p.9) we have a deft account of man's unremitting desire for sexual fulfilment described in almost "biological determinist" terms, yet alluding to the nuances inherent in any discussion of male dominance within a given society, as is suggested by the mention of Foucault:

take her up, stroke her belly
she'll think of Foucault

The biological controlling impulses of the male driven to physical action is counter-balanced by the cerebral passivity of the female who, by thinking of Foucault, both gives in to the male's seduction ploy but also demonstrates an intellectuality that is not evident in the male at this particular moment in their relationship.

The problematical relationship between the sexes is further evinced in terms of consciousness in the 'Madame Psychoses' section. In 'Sarah Israel' (p.33) we see how memory almost reinvents or remodels the past regarding a yearned for "other":

I saw her in a seeing not seen by any eye,
& the "I" that saw, saw my eye not at all.

Here, identity and perception become entwined as the punning of 'eye' with 'I' demonstrates. This punning acts as a poetic device to illustrate the very real inextricable union that identity and perception must necessarily have. It is a union so binding that the two become mutually exclusive causing the poet confusion as he struggles to wade his way through something of solipsist maze. In 'Paula' (p.37) we see the ultimate expression of male sexual and emotional yearning that represents the lot of Everyman:

chaos, order, clipped bird-like into
wings & cries. I could only ever
think; paula. all the thrusts &
pumps that could never be. "all"
that must be withheld, & that
it might be better that way.

you gave me the gift; savouring
wanting. how it really was you
I wanted. not a body but a soul.

I tell myself I've "been through
you", forever & never. zero here,
same as two. empty.saturated. dark

I have quoted the entire poem. Such is its universality pertaining to male desire any commentary by me would be more than superfluous. Indeed, it would not be outlandish to suggest that in this poem Field has articulated more than John Donne allowed himself to in those poems of Donne's that evince similar concerns.

Steve Halle on "Beams": Fluid/Exchange (2006)

It's something all young poets talk about: how do I promote my work before a collection is published without a steady audience of poetry enthusiasts? Adam Fieled's EP "Virtual Pinball/Madame Psychosis" is as good an answer to this dilemma as I've seen in some time. Building on the success of MiPOesias and its cross publication of print verse with MP3 files of poets reading said work, Fieled's CD-R recording is memorable because the format differs from standard print poetry.

In the same way music lodges itself in one's brain, Fieled's polished and practiced reading style on this EP has the same effect, as lines become ingrained in the one's mind after several in-depth listens. It has stated been by many poets and critics that no one reads a poem better than its author, so here we get a taste of how to read not only Fieled's poetry (and his collaborations with Lars Palm) but also post-avant work in general.

As a devotee of T. S. Eliot, Fieled is highly aware of the objective correlative, and he works with language as objects to craft a specific emotion instead of being trapped by the lyric or narrative impulses of what one may call mainstream poetry. Take for example the poem "debbie jaffe," which can also be found on nth position in print format. The fun thing about "debbie jaffe" and Fieled's recent poetry in general is the poem is completely different when heard on the EP than read online. The reason for the variance is Fieled's use of similar sounding words or word patterns. In "debbie jaffe," we hear "seize her" when we listen to the poem but read "caesar" when we read it online or "urge to pull" becomes "urge, two, pull." These variances stretch the poem's depth beyond either medium.

Another aspect of these homonyms is Fieled's ability to play with the epiphanic "I." Escaping the stranglehold of the epiphanic "I" in contemporary poetics is certainly on Fieled's mind, not only in "debbie jaffe," but also in "eye eye eye," which adds further play as it doubles as a slang expression for exasperation. Fieled's reinvention of narrative allows for sexual tension or frustration in his person poems like "lizzie mclean:"

was all pot roast. hope:
that i can't hold, doll.
for you write, wrong. big.
bold. ass, a nine-volt shite.
"boners were tulips", yes,
butt, i never, have never,
battered heads, as such,
w/ you. its' all weary
simper. i, conned, take,
your, "can't."

Fieled enhances the tension by using lots of punctuation, which serves to slow the reading of a short piece. The punctuation also gives the poem focus by forcing our attention on single words. This is true as the poem is read or heard as each word's purpose as object is set apart

while simultaneously working with the rest of the line.

The "Virtual Pinball/Madame Psychosis" EP is worth a listen. Field certainly undertakes important language experiments while working outside of the traditional poetry "box" we have become too accustomed to.

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III. When You Bit...

Preface

I set this particular book, *When You Bit...*, in Chicago, because I visited Chicago several times between 2006 and 2008. 2006 was another pivotal year for me—in many ways, the Philly Free School in its original form effectively ended (Mike Land's 7/29/06 extravaganza at the Highwire being the final Free School show with all the "classic" elements in place), I finished my M.F.A. and began as a University Fellow at Temple, and, most importantly, harnessed all my energy (which hitherto had suffered some dissipation) towards writing and publishing poetry seriously. I hit some open spaces and some walls instantly—*Beams* was published by Blazevox in late 2007, but accepted for publication in October '06; roughly the same time my first poems appeared in *Jacket Magazine*. The walls I hit had to do with the infrastructure of the Philly poetry community. During the Philly Free School years, I was shielded from facing this infrastructure—by a vibrant social nexus, by our multi-media approach, and by my then-scattershot approach to publishing. Now, I found a new world which was bitter, brittle, hard, and cold, and I found it alone (Mike, Nick, Mary, Abby, and the rest had gone their separate ways, at least temporarily).

The Philly poetry world, at high levels and where high-stakes publishing was concerned, was run by old money and what could be purchased, which was everything. Two or three tightly constructed and connected cliques ruled the roost, and demanded absolute conformity and forfeit of control for entrance or acceptance. These cliques also frowned on sexualized behavior and artistic work; on attractive looking people in general; and on poets being judged by talent, rather than by strictly reined-in and by-certain-books behavior. This all sounds rather daunting, and it was. But the key figures in these cliques were also hopelessly untalented geeks, bizarre looking, and not particularly taken seriously by anyone outside of Philadelphia. One of their funniest riffs was about talent—in their world, there was no "talent," and "talent" was a myth created by naïve patriarchal authorities to impose subaltern status on their underlings, etc, etc. They also hated poetry—"it's not the poems, it's the thoughts about the poems." The net effect of all this meshigas is that by late 2006, I had seen a new, waste land version of the city I loved. I was determined and ambitious—I wasn't going to run back to curating Free School shows, and give up the idea of making my name as a poet. I also had some newfangled advantages—the Net, and particularly Blogger, were finding ways to save my ass. But the whole in-love-with-Philly, Free School vibe had turned sour. Philadelphia: a Gemini, to boot.

As of late 2006, the new Philly for me was a monstrosity. If I was going to find romance, intoxication, and intrigue, I'd have to look elsewhere. Because, during the course of doing my M.F.A. I had befriended a Chicago-area poet named Steve Halle, it looked like Chicago might be an option. I made arrangements to visit Chicago in December '06—to stay with Steve in the Chicago suburb Palatine where he lived, to read with him at Myopic Books in Wicker Park, Chicago, and in general to commiserate with the Chicago poetry community. My visits to Chicago weren't anywhere near as baroque as the Free School years—moderate drinking and drugging, no carnivorous carnality. But I did find Chicago enchanting, and unique, particularly Wicker Park, which was always our first stop in town. Chicago reminded me of the best bits of New York and D.C. in composite form—the cleanliness of the one, the imposing scale of the other. I liked the fact that being in Chicago (even more than New York) was like being marooned on an island in the middle of America—and that middle America (places like Palatine) was a sight to see. I found life in

Palatine like being on the moon.

In short, I found Chicago imaginatively stimulating enough that the weight of dealing with waste land Philadelphia was balanced. The idea for *When You Bit...* began from a small incident which happened at a bar in Andersonville after one of my Chicago readings in mid 2007— a Chicago poetess picked up my arm and bit it. She and some of her friends became the Muses for *When You Bit...* I decided, early in the game, to employ the sonnet form here— both because the emotions of longing and confinement were being investigated, and because I felt I could take the sonnet form someplace new, towards transgression and perversion. My particular Chicago Muses were two poetesses who seemed to always show up as a Dynamic Duo— as the initial portion of the book would investigate a ménage between a protagonist and the two of them. The middle section of the book would dwell on the protagonist's interiority; and then the final portion of the book would reunite the protagonist with one of the Dynamic Duo. As I mentioned in an interview with *Mipoesias* in '08, the narrative structure of the book is this: 3, 1, 2. The action is set in Chicago, but doesn't necessarily need to be— the real activity is in the protagonist's consciousness, as it and he sift through the vicissitudes and junk-heaps of the flesh to find something genuine. A book I hoped Sir Philip Sydney would appreciate.

Adam Fieled, 2013

I. Sister Lovers

Three Sets of Teeth

Three sets of teeth: who
can check for cavities?
A three-way circuit: who
will start the striptease?
Three lovers in three ways:
how merrily the dance
begins. We spin, we spin,
we forget our instincts,
anima, the part of teeth
that cuts. We are sluts.
There is an "I" here that
stands for all of us, but
its eyes are shut. Sleep
lulls it to rest, not think. Or speak.

A Web, A World, Wide

You and you: more than
acquainted. You stand up
next to each other, knock
back tequila shots, scope
out cowboy belted dudes.
You're well acquainted w
velvet-handed touches,
window-pane lizards. Then
I blow into town, rugged
as a slick-booted rancher,
hard as Japanese math. I
show off rope-length for
your amusement: something's
spun: a web, a world, wide.

Salt Orchard

Oh to be between
two startled deer
on a bus, one bare-
backed, one shut-
eyed, both blue.
Oh exquisite torture.
One's more
mermaid than
deer, salt orchard.
One cannot
get too laid.
I take off my
boots, both say
shoot, shoot.

In the Street

Orgasmic Furniture Cellar:
OFC, bar-back, bare-back,
Guyville. Toast: to circles.
Then stand against a wall
in an alley, paw-slide, drip,
listen to car-screech as we
taste the first spoils tingle.
Couples leave: we laugh,
being more, being three.
Throw down a butt: it's
a red flower dropped, a
filled cup, I'm your butt.
Mouths: scotch-tang, I'm
eating scotch. Let's scoot.

Apartment: Pizza Guy

Apartment: I'm lost.
Here a bed, there a
bed: no everywhere.
Scattered butts hang.
Couch: seat between
two, silk-skirted, red.
Blood on tracks left
on coats, racks, bed-
spreads, cool, kempt.
Vibe: pulsing wants.
Sandwich, mayo me,
white-out, come age.
Hey, you and you: do
I look like a pizza guy?

Big Black Car

Your middle: tongue
(hers), man (me), riding
together, I bitch (middle's
middle). I tongue man
you, her, spacious, it, of
you, all of us, can't feel
a nothing, I can't. Not
of this, of you, of her,
of all of this riding, in
what looks big, black,
has tongue-room. I
can't feel a thing. I feel
nothing of bigness, black
fur interior her you. Ride.

Back of a Car

Asinine, as is, this ass is:
ass I zip down into zero:
anal, a null, a void, this is.
I'm behind a behind that
sits smoking, rubbing, pink-
tipped, tender, butt, button.
She watches me watching as
I go brown-nose in another.
Only *her car-ness*, averted by
eyes to a wall, seems happy.
Only she can stomach rubs
of the kind that want plugs.
Sparked tank, here comes
no come, & aggravation.

Bathtub

Syntactic inversion, when
applied to three lovers, is
a bathtub forced to hold
more than it needs to. I
want to emphasize this:
at no point did I touch
both at once. In fact, if
you take a way a rogue-
red surface, how dismal:
soap, bubbles, razors, &
a bunch of drunken limbs.
Not much ecstasy. Fog in
mirrors meant confusion,
not consummation. Or come.

Charnel Smoke

We're no holy trinity—
our mouths full of glass-
bits stained red, altars set
up to hold limbs heaved
over each other, cement-
thick, drizzled on, wisps
of charnel smoke rising
in clumps of sodden ash.
Resurrection is just more
sex, incarnation guessed
dimly, owing to jolts in
groins groined like earth.
I say "love", what comes?
Nothing but wine, bodies.

Downs

Round two, night, too:
rubber off, rubber soul,
knee-bounce, they take
turns taking it, & me, in
where shadow-plays go.
Sheets: washed. Pillows:
put up for my head, as
she leans in, hands on
my ass, as bounces her
other, as I am hollow,
as this is a perfect void.
As this is, as things go,
a thing for the Internet.
I am ghosted: house of undoing.

Sunday Morning

Dawn: two down, one up.
I'm a blown-out tire, limp,
scuttling to roadside diners,
sipping coffee alone, both
hungers hung like posters
in chill blood-contours,
sputtered past me, paste.
I took them on in haste,
so close behind me they
lay, laid, lying in wait to
do it all again, leave me
without a pump, means
of being full. I feel dull.
Memento mori means eggs.

Sunny Afternoon

Wicker Park coffee bar:
I'm stirred, ill-starred, I
sit surrounded. Bounds
the deer, straight into a
headlight: two, bright. I
hang on one more cup,
rapping to a sylph that
hovers above: *save me
from this squeeze*, tracks
on my knee. She stirs
me more. I spoon #2
better, who's on a cell
phone date even as we
speak: *talk to me*. Please.

Blue Monday

Inside out, upside-down,
round & round. Now it's
cyber, in screen-space, our
dance is, on the Net, it is.
A post posted post-haste.
I'm a cipher, propping up
a pungent myth, academic
feminists might go for. I
sit alone, screened, screams
churning in guts, undone.
Group grope blog bloke,
that's me, player in three,
fuck in words cut too, I
& you two, cut & pasted.

Tuesday

Yesterday don't matter:
it's gone. Now: cut. I'm
aghast. You're there, or,
you're here with me. No
car in sight. Sunset over
Millennium. Big bean is
accomplice. Look at the
big blue water: it's us, &
us alone, together, here,
now, acid-peaking sans
acid. Macro hand-holds.
Micro lip-twists. Simple:
I'm learning it these days.
One on one: game, play.

Grudge-Fucks

This, crazy, water-leakage:
I slip-slide away into you,
out of you, into her, out of
her, we're oil-slicked birds
squawking out minor-key
laments for lost closure. I
hang on the end of clothes-
lines: I'm ten sheets, each
dripped w grease, blood,
butter, milk, a catalogue of
epic grudge-fucks. Not that
anyone has come. Each kiss
is a suicide Jack in a game:
sixty-nine innings. No draw.

Cocaine Gums

I ache: dull, sharp,
in a heap of paper.
All paper: picture,
bright, bold, dark.
I have nailed you
to a piece: black.
I darken touched
things: I'm used.
I write you, you,
you, as if kissed
by a fresh body,
rose-petal bliss.
I drowse: numb
as cocaine gums.

Framed

Nailed, two, across— I
have been glimpsing me
from above, as a camera
would, I am a still, this
is a film, this has to be
framed, no, don't hold,
I can't, it's an offstage
arm, both you & you
speak like I'm (so) not
here, I'm celluloid, I'm
varicose, vein-soft, fake-
bloody, cut, I can't move,
you & you & I minted,
taped, uncensored, dead.

Gun Shy

How much can I?
Far from gun-shy,
I load, loaded, you.
I did, and you, too.
You and you come.
You took me. You
slicked come to run.
I'm bled, come too.
Awake, shaky, bed:
gun set red to stun.
Get myself ahead.
Get myself my gun.
How much gun for
three in love? None.

Dear Prudence

I nail this down in verse
for one reason: pleasure
is an oasis in a desert of
fruitless labor, that is our
writing-place. This is
as valid as plucking fallen
leaves in a crisp October
dusk. In other words, I
was given cranium, on
many levels, drawn out
into an outpouring, she
made sure, I gasped out
a dying fall, convergence
occurred. Sue me, dear prudence.

Just You

Don't choose two:
I choose you, I do.
I choose to do you,
I choose to be you
in different places,
I am taking you too.
Two is too much, is
too little, is butter to
milk shakes. Makes
sense to choose, it's
the best I can do, I
have no other mood,
moments are you, &
just you, too: just you.

II. Dancing with Myself

Whiskey

I don't think I know anything:
look how the sun sets in March,
a cool night, not dappled, not
glazed, a construction crew in
the street, grinding away at
pavement. These are my worlds,
alone, waiting to be born again
into her, or you, if you want to
read this: streets, walking, cool
like a flaneur around a city I
haven't loved in five years. I
know we'll come together again,
and if we don't I won't be to
blame. Tonight's for whiskey.

Gist

Baudelaire conflated solitude
with multitude. He was wrong.
Or, look how good it can get,
& bad, when you're backed in
to a corner with only work to
prop you up & give you gist.
I'm in love with you, I spit
when I say it cause I feel like
I live in my churned guts, I
look out the window, there's
a street called Race, *ba ba*, I
couldn't be any slower except
if I started popping ludes again.
Once-a-minute heartbeats rend.

Dark Lady

You're more of a Dark Lady
than I have ever hoped for,
especially because when you
betray me, it's with someone
I love: me.

You're more of
everything, actually, & you're
also a pain in the ass. That's
why I haven't let you off the
hook. I'll wind up in my own
hands again tonight, sans
metaphors, like your full
moon in my face, but you'll
never know there's a man in you.

Off

I write best when I have
time to write well, & when
I don't I cook dinner for
myself, its' undercooked, I'm
underfed, as the moon gives
the stars head & I look at a
new skyscraper & remember
other, better times in my life,
who I was then, & yes I feel
myself start to spin like a top.
I have lived, I'm living, & it
only moves in one direction:
on. My "on" is different than
anyone's, it really is. It's off.

Kinky Verbs

We have coffee, we talk.
It's all very matter of-fact,
which is funny because I
sit there with a gargantuan
hard-on, & we start saying
the same things & I want
to reach over the table,
grab you, throttle, shake,
pounce, bite, tear, chew,
lick, all those kinky verbs.
I measure out my life in
Eliot quotes: this moment
can't be forced to its crisis
yet, but I'm no pair of ragged claws.

Kurt Cobain

About Kurt Cobain: I swear
(as I always have, even in high
school) that I don't have a gun,
& when I shoot it won't kill
you (much.) Suicide applies
also to pairs of people who
make one person lying down,
& every two-backed beast
must decide at some point
to live or die. These are the
kind of thoughts you have
on really long nights, when
you find yourself too old
to do drugs. Comfort in sadness?

Palliative

I think of a window-jump:
a bloody corpse, pavement.
The point of no-point, gist
of no-gist, nothing mirrored,
just me dead. Smart to wait,
eh? Smart to see if maybe
something might happen. I
am holed up here, cloistered,
you might say, in this flesh
of my flesh, body I call me.
You may ask how many bets
have been hedged. I choose
(if you ask) not to answer. I
find silence palliative, free.

Crumb

My physical mechanism,
burnt beyond belief, sits
cross-legged on a wooden
chair, writing this out. I'm
listening to the first birds
of spring: urban hymns,
sonnets. Surely birds learn
at some point not to peck
at crumbs in the street, or
maybe not. I am, myself,
a crumb in the street, but
nobody's pecking, not now
anyway, this sixty degree
night, pitched to sub-frenzy.

Accost, accost

Staggering for a cigarette,
a Goon cliché, chez me.
I call your name out over
rooftops in my head: on-
lookers note how my
neck-veins strain, body
tenses, aura turns black-blue.
I am become a late Rothko,
waiting to be placed in a
chapel, where you may glide
by like Keats' Madeline
& I can accost, accost.
I fall, I swell: "thorns
of life" is a neighbor's cell.

Splat!

What greatness thrust upon
me? Solitary Saturday night
fever, jive talking to myself,
doing lines of Advil, falling
off imaginary bridges: splat!
The familiar trope of falling
endlessly, this is how I stay
alive. All because you are, I
affirm, more than a woman,
but, unfortunately, not just
to me, but to many generally.
I suppose I could blazon you:
rhubarb thighs, persimmon
twat, etc, but not productively,
& what would Travolta say?

One Long Mistake

Once I heard a Zen master
say, *my life is one long mistake.*
Well, as I lean into afternoon,
I notice that running errands
doesn't solve anything, & I'm
defeated by my rudeness &
everyone else's too, & I look
forward to a day where I don't
feel taxed to the point of idiocy.
What happened was, I received
an insult in the mail, & threw
the I-Ching & a tough hexagram
came up. My father's son turned
out not to be me, but online, him.

Objective Correlative

Talk about an objective
correlative: I walked into
my bathroom to find a
huge cockroach on its
back beside the toilet,
legs flailing (having just
discovered God's death
in Nietzsche, I'd guess),
but at any rate I killed
the bloody bastard, it
felt good, I felt strong
& thought: wow, to be
God all I have to do is
keep killing: what a buzz!

Deodorant Redolence

Rage is senseless, I rage
in a cloud of senselessness
against the confines of a
first layer of rage against
the confines of a region
of loneliness buttressed
by a feeling that deodorant
is an insult against redolence
that I haven't guts to embrace.
I shower every morning, I
even bathe after I shower,
what this has to do with
anything is beyond me,
except that I like your dirt.

Narrow Alley

I had a spiritual moment,
standing outside Wagon
Train, waiting for a pot of
coffee to brew, consisting
of this: sunlight striking a
brick wall on the far side
of a narrow alley put me
in London talking to Chris
McCabe on a sunny pied
day, not grey: languidness
mixed with desire through.
I leaned against a lamppost,
& this impressed me most:
as spirit goes, nothing moves.

Hyperventilation

Hyperventilation of almost
there: we'll make it yet, on a
dove's wing or any adorable
cliché you can imagine, we'll
make it, & then all this sad
time between will seem like
sheets of sound never heard.
We stand in our own history,
newly made & in the making,
we stand for each other &
for laying down together to
lay down burden's burden,
to make love's love in stereo.
I'm not a saint, you're not a ho.

Time's Arrow

Cigarettes smoke me, I
languish in their mouths.
I am eaten by my dinner,
flushed by my toilet, put
on the shelf by my books.
Time's arrow means that
the next line happened
before this, I am moving,
not crab-like, sideways,
but backwards towards
my birth. If everything
that's to happen between
us already is or was, I can't
whine about being born again.

Lick Butts

I find Philly full of shit.
I find the streets shabby,
the bars tacky, the poets
worse. What's all this if
you're here? Nothing. I
can embrace mediocrities,
lick butts off sidewalks,
piss in alleyways, only for
the joy of being near you.
But I'm still waiting, even
for that, & it's a chilly day, &
I just swallowed a razor, it
tasted like musk of scallops.
I joked when I said I'd lick butts.

Office

This is my office: shit.
Imagination abeyance,
piercing eyes abruptly
withheld like legal pad
documentation of a car
trip around America. I
say, where are you, but
I know exactly where you
are, & how long it will
be before everything can
be spilled into its proper
container. No windows
in here either, an article
tacked to the wall: Jacket.

Stomach Flu

It's like, I have a virus
in my guts that forces
me to puke you up every
time I eat anything tasty.
I puke, shaking through.
I know what I need to do—
stop cigarettes & coffee &
booze & toffee & all things
that seem excremental
when lust for life has gone
rusty. Your increased bust
has made me allergic to
cherry flavored colas, syrups,
brandy, candy fits, & shit.

Tomorrow

In our beginnings are our
ends: tomorrow we meet.
I have called *de profundis*,
you have listened, & now
we're younger than a fete
in Liverpool, July, 1957, a
drunken teenager lighting
up a stage, come on, let's.
More happy love! More
happy, happy love! What's
happiest is the perception
that my eyes are clarified
to/for you, to/for me, &
when we're incarnate, one.

II. Two of Us

Screw

I want you to be like a bull.
I want you to call me a fool.
I want to be ass-proud for you.
I want you to call me to screw.
I know this iambic is dry.
I know this excess has to stop.
I know I can laughably cry.
I know blood can come drop by drop.
I come for you kicking my ass.
I've come to be making a pass.
I've come undistracted by "I".
I killed off my "I" as it's dry.
I start off these lines in the sand.
I want to end up in your hand.

When You Bit...

I knew every Dracula-like whim
I felt every pulse of salt-water
I screwed every screw into wood
I was with you in Atlantis

you were daft, exalted, pinkish
you were drunk on Margaritas
you were dark, pliant, rakish
you were ready to be examined

by my hands, twin detonators
by my tongue, laid on a half-shell
by my teeth, rabid officers
by my torso, raw, wave-flecked

this is not merely afterthought
this is portentous as first-time sparks

Sweat

I'm willing to sweat
to get to you, if you
promise to sweat me
hard as any August.
I exert myself in red
exercises, smeared
lipstick on assets, not
yours, but this is not
what I'm coming to.
I'm coming, not to
get but to come out
and in, in and out of
what we might call love.
I pump you full of lost crickets.

Hips

I didn't have to let
my hands slide down to
your hips, but I did it
to express to you that
gravity works between
us, apples fall from
trees, knowledge lives
in apples, intact or bit.

There is no blush here.
There is only a stemmed
sense of the inevitable.
I am bitten through. I
am waiting for you to peel
"sin" from "skin". Again. Again.

Cake Walk

Am I rough enough
to disperse kinks in
your make-up, hitch
you to a post, make

you wait for my cake?
Waiting can be a bitch
when your sanded skin
still feels scraped, tough.

This could be cake-walk.
Are you too jealous, do
you feel urges to stalk
each stile I walk through?

What you see, you batter.
What you walk on, matters.

Duration

This eclipse: I'm durable
only before, after. Throat
parched, nightingale loud
in my trees, I'm beechen.
I'm green. I send myself
into forests after you, I
skip over streams, being
stone: heavy, jagged, on
top of slugs, worms, dirt.
My heart: too thick, aches.
I don't want beer, I want
to be wound around you.
Deliverance: beds of muck.
It's what I can say you suck.

Empress, Reversed

I can feel how you want to turn
newly colored leaves over, but
not turn over yourself: thusly
avoiding change's busy necessity.
I am a leaf to you, I am openly
veined. I am not to tap but to
paste in a book, frozen in place,
tidy crisp surface, sun-spotted
but easily taken inside. I feel this,
with a sense of being rooted
elsewhere: in ocean, breakers,
crashing only to lash again.
Your creation is an alien.
I call him illegal.

Decreased

Skin is pierced; veins jarred;
quickly interiors come out.
You are decreased by me.
I am decrease made flesh,
piercing you, letting eddies
(preciously stored) free.
To be dead together: death.
Dead things are not scarred;
they drop, decay, stiffen. If
life is soft, this death is hard.
I say “death”, I mean what
compels me to bite you. My
nails: bitten through. What’s
simple to you: out of my eyes.

Mouth Around

I could fly with you
around the universe,
it would be no worse
than a kiss so untrue
it stings like alcohol,
or jellyfish veins, red
& blue, near squalls
of ocean, kept in bed.

If my currents sting, I
must say it's because
I'm a fool, pie-eyed,
with no grasp of laws
that teach our mouths
quiet. I mouth around.

Salmon

To swim up you, relax
into currents, join them
like upstream salmon, I
must forget skinned fins
you ate with relish, stew.
What I get; more head to
head swimming, or back
to back lust purges, screw-
topped horizontal strips.

I am no more and no less
than your zebra, zebra in
transition to fish, striped
to attract water out of you,
to move me softly to blue.

Hay Ride

I do long swings for
you, I am a monkey, I
climb without haste to
a perch of your making.
I am full of tricks, I can
see how you tinge, dye,
fringe, flip things around.
I do not wish to climb
down. I swing between
your legs, everywhere
else, too. You've taught
me what to do. Caught
in a sort of jungle hay-ride,
I eat what meat has died.

Denuded

Just because I remembered
your birthday, you think I
want to blow your candles.
I don't. I want to flick a
wick towards your wax
parts, partly waxing. I
want to pretend this is
a no-icing situation. I
have no scruples. I have
a bunch of holders. I
have a sense of timing
where fire is concerned.
Every match is happy.
Every suit is denuded.

Straw Rut

Well! If I were the twerp
you said I was, how did
the Red Sea part when I
crossed borders into hid
zones, stepped over your
straw rut to find a bed,
wove a winding sheet into
fortune-fucked tapestries?
Not that your head-flips
(matted flaxen vanity) or
self-satisfied, beer-dripped

smirks ever plagued my
flesh, but that you tried.

Severance

I will leave you, presently,
as your lips to me remain
marsh-grass catching dust
from a whirlwind of pain,
bulrushes sans Moses, rust
on the hinge of a trapdoor
used to fool circus-goers
into aping a jealous Moor.
Oh you are elegant, for
you know each sonnet
backwards that was ever
spat, but still you're on it,
the bed, with limbs severed.

Love Poem

You say I'm "out there",
you're "in here", where
you are, if here's a crab's
shell, a patch of crab-

grass, anything sharp or
snappish. You're closed,
simply. Or, say the war
points us from closure.

Don't wreck composure.
Don't mold me in spite.
Don't do anything, but
open yourself as a door,

that a knob might be used,
"in" & "out" re-confused.

I'm Down

Forest: within it, I'm
field mice, I scamper.
Over still streams I
watch your beechen
green strips fold off.
I hide beneath logs,
consoled by slugs. I
intermix w acorns, I
sharpen my teeth on
pictures of you. I am
down wells. I'm down.
My body is grounded.
I've been pounded by
solitude: thus, I frown.

Stiff Scorpions

This desert is of me: rubies
scattered past stiff scorpions.
Each tail that could've come
up, over small heads, now past
latency into permanent prick.
What's dead is still sharp: do
you dare wrest red rocks from
this heap? Are you scorpionic
too? Have they kicked you out
of encampments for flexing your
tail? These carcasses are wounds
I have given; rocks a secretion of
each short, sharp shock. I have
stung. I go on. Can you come?

Salted Skin

You're way out to sea
when you roll down your
car window, blast songs
written for high school
parking lots. I'm hardly
there. I'm occasional. I
float like an abandoned
raft in the passenger seat,
smoking butts, smoked
by your insistent nerves.
Maybe I glance over to
you, maybe not. Either
way, your salted skin
glistens, reflects, repels.

Sheet Covered

I am ready not for bed,
but for being sheeted,
shuddered over, under,
completed by your head.
This is no thin slice of
what passes for profane
love, gives aches, pains,
and also is sheet-covered.
I mean to say, sheets can
be a kind of metaphor, or
substitute for what plans
we make to cover wars.
I am ten sheets to wind.
I want you to bed me again.

Hooded Eyes

I am alone with alone
tasting dregs, begging
to be let free into red,
where mouths leak rose,

where come-hither glows,
& all the things she said
hover around me singing,
& the ways we were stoned

inhabit us like spirits,
light radiates out of us,
Gods are laughing near us,
not a sale but clearance

to be young, vindicated by
a certain gleam in hooded eyes...

Parts of this book have appeared in Anti Magazine, No Tell Motel, Otoliths, Skicka.

A portion of this book (“Dancing with Myself”) is also available to be listened to on PennSound.

The first edition of the book was released in print by Otoliths in 2008.

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**John Bloomberg-Rissman on “Three Sets of Teeth” from “When You Bit...”:
Galatea Resurrects (2012)**

I chose this poem for three reasons:

- 1) First poem in the book;
- 2) Since the title of the book is *When you bit ...*, a poem with teeth in the title seemed appropriate;
- 3) I used to know a guy with two sets of teeth. So the title resonated.

The poem's a sonnet; this is a book of sonnets. It's a very musical sonnet. There are end-rhymes, rhymes mid-line, near/off rhymes, and other kinds of musics, too. So it's quite possible to read this poem on a sonic level, which smoothes out the “argument”, so to speak. I'm at the end before you know it. Without realizing I've just passed thru a series of complexities ...

Tho that's not quite true. At one point, the music is quite harshly consonantal, which stops me dead in my tracks: “that cuts. We are sluts.” That initial c ... those following t's ... not to mention the guttural rhyme ... Something is going on here. I should pause over it. So let's go back, a little more slowly this time.

“Three Sets of Teeth. / / Three sets of teeth: who / can check for cavities?” As noted above, when I read this title I thought of the guy with two sets of teeth and wondered whether someone had three. There's nothing in these first two lines to suggest otherwise. In fact, “who / can check for cavities?” had me picturing an incredibly crowded mouth and a really tripped-out dentist. The next two-three lines (remember, this is my 2nd time thru ...) disabuse me that we're talking about one mouth here. Which leaves me puzzling over “who / can check for cavities?” Once I realize that three mouths are involved, the crazed dentist image disappears. Which leaves me with the possibility that we're dealing with a pun on “cavities”, and perhaps the first thoughts of the love-fest to come.

“A three-way circuit: who / will start the striptease?” Erotic tension, with a decision to act upon it. But it is a little nerve-wracking to get these things going. Someone has to unbutton the first button.

“Three lovers in three ways: / how merrily the dance / begins. We spin, we spin,” Apparently the first (and last) buttons are undone and the loving begins. With great joy and pleasure, apparently. “Three lovers in three ways” is an interesting locution; it could indicate any number of things, e.g., the relationships between the three differ; each lover has his own kinks; the positions (and “cavities”) vary; or it could simply mean that this is a three-way. Or any number of other things, none of which are specified.

“we forget our instincts, / anima, the part of teeth / that cuts.” Uh, oh, trouble in Paradise. I'm not sure exactly what has gone wrong. Has jealousy arisen (is it considered here as an

instinct?) Or, if not jealousy, some other problem?

(I google “anima sex” and google gives me “animal sex”, and “anime sex” which I’m sure – which I have no doubt – are interesting, but they don’t seem particularly apposite here ...).

Anyway.

In Jungian psychology, the anima is the feminine within the male (that little yin dot within the yang). According to Wikipedia,

Jung believed anima development has four distinct levels, which he named *Eve, Helen, Mary and Sophia*. In broad terms, the entire process of anima development in a male is about the male subject opening up to emotionality, and in that way a broader spirituality, by creating a new conscious paradigm that includes intuitive processes, creativity and imagination, and psychic sensitivity towards himself and others where it might not have existed previously.

It seems possible that insufficient development of the anima has rendered some aspect of this three-way problematic. But it’s impossible to tell what has gone wrong, exactly. All we know is that, however wonderful the dance, at a certain point it ends up with

“We are sluts.” I don’t quite know how instinct, anima, and “the part of teeth / that cuts” has led to this conclusion. After all, feeling like a slut is an internalization of culture, not of instinct, etc.

Unless. Unless. Unless there is NO trouble in paradise, and the forgetting of instinct, anima, etc somehow leads one to triumph in one’s sluttishness. Tho I have to admit that I don’t know how that happens, either.

“There is an “I” here that / stands for all of us, but / its eyes are shut. Sleep / lulls it to rest, not think. Or speak.” Is the “I” that stands for all of us the Jungian unconscious? I don’t know, I don’t want to read too much into the single word “anima”. “[A]ll of us” could simply mean the three participants, who have been satisfied into unconsciousness. Unconsciousness that is utterly silent, utterly without need for self-expression, dead to the world, inside and out. That’s one hell of a fine satisfaction.

The depth of the sleep leads me to favor the interpretation of the sluts bit given two paragraphs above. But somehow the fact that the “shut” eyes have to do with “cuts” and “sluts” still troubles me, since I don’t have a solid reading of that bit. Perhaps it’s not an either/or; it could be a both/and.

IV. Posit/Chimes

Preface

Posit, released as a Dusie chap in June 2007, was my first print publication. Most of the Posit poems had been written in the winter months which joined 2006 and 2007. It was my first year as a University Fellow at Temple University in Philadelphia, and a Fellowship year— I didn't have to teach. In the fall of 2006, I had done a graduate workshop with Rachel Blau DuPlessis. She called her own work "post-Objectivist"— a continuation of the investigative interrogation of textual subjectivity by poets like George Oppen and Carl Rakosi (who called themselves Objectivists), with a slant towards feminism and a bias towards Deconstructionist literary theory. Rachel was heavily critical of any first person sensibility, expressed in poetic language, which didn't take the time to investigate and interrogate its own efficacy. The belief that language could only be justified "qua language," rather than language opening a transparent window on whatever a naïve subject desires you (as reader) to see (this thought-circuit is a lift from Derrida) was one Rachel carried through all her writing and reading tasks. I was thirty, and just beginning to publish seriously— I couldn't help but be influenced.

The mood I caught, while composing the Posit poems that winter, was a congeries of this influence with other contingent factors— my first trip to Chicago in December '06 (memorialized in *Illinois Sky*), the spookiness of West Philadelphia and the Eris Temple (*Le Chat Noir*), and even the perceived contemporary relevance of Greek myth (*Eyeballs*). I separated myself from Rachel's formulations by maintaining a narrative voice— without a narrative voice, what animates poetry to begin with? Rachel's own work suffered heavily from lack of a strong narrative voice— even more from the notion that narrative itself was (and even could be) outdated and outmoded. Rachel, for some reason, associated narrative with the nineteenth century— but the truer association is more thoroughgoing, i.e. poetic language is impossible (utterly so) without narrative, for words following words to create narrative is what creates the effect of symbol and art, always. Poetry sans narrative struck me as a gimmick, and still does. Rachel and her compeers did betray a weakness for gimmick, which compromised their self-praised idealism.

In any case, Posit did not disavow narrative cohesion, nor did it fall prey to gimmick-mongering. The cohesion of the chapbook as a gestalt is loosely themed around not only an interrogation but a celebration of the poetic "I," not relying on the disjunctures and ellipses which were trendy in 2007, but on sensual objective correlatives (*Illinois Sky*, *Le Chat Noir*, *Eyeballs*, *Dracula's Bride*) and formal experiments which combined disjunctures with straightforward narrative (*Posit*, *Come to the Point*, *Day Song*). The theoretical gist of Posit is this— mixing the tenets of Deconstructionism with poetic language is richest and most rewarding if, amidst the ellipses and disjunctures, poetic language is allowed to be itself— to carry, not only narrative and voice, but sensuality, imagery, simile/metaphor, and intimations of profound emotion. If all the constituent elements which form the backbone of poetic language are lost, what's left is a mere husk— and American avant-garde poetry, for the second half of century XX and into century XXI, is largely a congeries of husks, hollow spaces and impoverished waste lands. Posit is meant to represent the initiation of a new, rich

strain of American poetry— and its influence has been felt.

AF, 2013

Posit

I want
but that's
nothing new.

I posit
no boundary
between us.

I say you,
I know you,
I think so.

I know
what world
is worldly.

I know
how death
stays alive.

I never
enter third
person places.

I could
go on
forever.

Come to the Point

I am that I
that stations metaphor
 on a boat to
be carried across.
that makes little
 songs on banisters,
which are slipped down.
that slips down
 antique devices,
china cutlery & white.
I am coming to
 the point. I am
come to the point.
I am that I.

Day Song

& this reflexivity, right now: how it bounds.
how we are the sum total of our limitations.
we catch glimpses. what's in the catching.
what's beyond, behind, between: purple fear.
bodies randomly chosen, for different reasons.
dreams of form. charades. too bad, but
always the knowledge, if we are lucky, of
scattered constellations in the world. chewable.
fragments. progress. only in patches. must. do.

Illinois Sky

One could sink upwards into
it, lose brown earthy stains.
Conglomerated air-pockets,

tucked into figments, wide
enough to lend temporality
sense, day's square progress.

This I don't know about, this
feeling, expanse contracted,
sex impulse etherealized, I

can't see this w former eyes.
It is, after all, a doorstep,
just me entering me again—

cream purse, vulval sheen.

Lars Palm Dream

I was skulking in
a dorm room with
Lars Palm, who
was chucking
lobsters. A yellow

globule tried to
get our goat; a wall
started talking.
Lars was furious.
Some girls were

involved with us,
as junk piled up.
Lars threw a
lobster at the
yellow globule,

roaring. It was
a pivotal moment—
bare walls. Rubbish
heap. Fucked
globules. We left.

Eyeballs

They sent a maid
to clean Jocasta's

chamber, a stout
ex-maenad, still

full of wine. She
happened upon

the two eyeballs
of Oedipus, doused

with blood, beneath
Jocasta's dangling

feet. They were
smooth, tender

as grapes. She
pocketed them.

They became play-
things for her cats.

Perhaps there is
use for everything,

she thought, raising
a glass to her lips;

and if I am a thief,
who will accuse me?

Rowdy Dream

I was slumming @
Andrew Lundwall's.
There was a demented
cook called Seana
w/ tortured ringlets.

There was a cooking
issue, a food problem.
I ate something.
I stayed on the fifth
floor, away from

rowdies on floors
two & three. My
Mom broke in,
spoke of better
food, more rowdies.

I wanted to be
more rowdy, left
floor five. Seana
spoke gibberish to
me in the kitchen.

I wasn't happy or
unhappy; I was in
the middle. All this
time Andrew Lundwall
sat on a throne on

floor one. I was
making my way
down there when
I awoke— no food.
I became rowdy.

To Bill Allegrizza, after reading *In the Weaver's Valley*

"I" must climb up
from a whirlpool
swirling down,
but sans belief
in signification.

"I" must say I
w/out knowing
how or why
this can happen
in language.

"I" must believe
in my own
existence,
droplets stopping
my mouth—

alone, derelict,
"I" must come back,
again, again,
'til this emptiness
is known, & shown.

Waiting for Dawn Ananda at Dirty Frank's

in the syntax of

my vodka-tonic,

& in the neon

smoke-rings

kisses hang

before breezes

Le Chat Noir

I pressed a frozen face
forward into an alley off
of Cedar St., herb blowing
bubbles (am I too high?) in

melting head I walked &
it was freezing & I walked
freezing into pitch (where's
the) blackness around a

cat leapt out & I almost
collapsed a black cat I
was panting & I almost
collapsed I swear from

the cold but look a cat
a black cat *le chat noir* oh no

Girl with a Cigarette, Modern Painters cover, January '07

You don't mean it, do you? You
don't know that the blue around
yr pupils is sky in a vice, that your
fingers are too complicated.

Nothing shows you that shadows
over yr neck do not account for
over-delicacy, that shoulders
simply squared reveal damaged

breast-matter. You smoke, not
knowing. You take a drag, too
picture-esque. Your pose is a
pose, your cheekbones simply ash.

10:15 Saturday Night

then like how bout we give this
thing a chance or at least not bury it
beneath a dense layer of this could
be anyone, we could be anyone,
anyone could be doing this, just
another routine, another way of
saying hello, & goodbye just

around the corner like a dull
dawn layered thick in creamy
clouds, ejaculations spent

Jessica Smith Dream

Jessica Smith was a corpse
on a bed on a screen in front
of me. She lay in darkness
w an obscure head. I touched

the screen— it grew red. I
touched her head on the screen
& she was alive again, &
blonde. I stepped back from

the screen, hearing her
breathing. I felt as if I had
performed an exorcism—
this was holy water. I shook

through the whole thing.

Dracula's Bride

I married into blood &
broken necks, endless
anemic privation, but

no regret. You see,
hunger fills me. I like
vampire hours (no

sleep), a blood-vessel
pay-check, diabolical
companionship, tag-team

seductions, guileless
maidens about to
be drunk.

We know what sweetness
is in starvation. We've
found, satiety

is death's approval stamp.
If you crave, there is
room left in you. If

you want, you are a
work-in-progress—
being finished is

a cadaver's province.
Better to suck
whatever comes.

Preface

I was born in New York City in 1976. The first few years of my life were spent in the New York area. Nevertheless, the first memories I have which carry a genuine sense of enchantment with them involve living in the Philadelphia suburb Elkins Park, where my family (which consisted of myself, my mother and father) moved in (if I remember correctly) late 1978. The house, 7825 Mill Road, was a blue twin we shared with a revolving cast of characters— for the nine years I lived there, no one seemed to settle into the twin directly adjacent to ours for more than a year. Though we had a spacious back yard with a shed (also painted blue), the general income level on that portion of Mill Road was resolutely lower middle class. Yet, the rusticity of the neighborhood made it enchanted for me— Tookany Creek running behind our block of twins, two Little League fields behind the creek with a generous chunk of good old-fashioned, Wordsworthian woods (now ploughed over into an apartment complex). Most of my friends had bigger, better-furnished houses than I did, but I didn't feel self-conscious about it. I always had adequate clothing and enough to eat.

Chimes begins from this ground; how it felt to be a lower middle class kid with a creative bent and an active imagination as the sucking 70s bled into the soulless 80s in America. In the midst of this, my parents divorced in a bitter and acrimonious way. I got used to splitting my weeks between them— the sense of enchantment I had with my father's studio apartment in the "Presidential" apartment complex on City Line Avenue in Philly comes to light here. By the late 80s, and the beginning of my adolescence, both of my parents had raised themselves materially— my mother was a practicing attorney and had purchased a middle-class consonant house for us on Old Farm Road in Wyncote; my father was still a teacher in the Philadelphia school system, but had married wealth, which his house, on Harrison Avenue in Glenside, reflected. As all these material transformations were taking place, Chimes does its version of Joyce, Proust, and Wordsworth— lays bare the process by which the artist's young imagination is constructed, through trials by fire and brushes with sexualized and intellectualized adulthood. I had already seen more class tiers than most American kids— my parents had both been raised poor, and my father's family that was left by the time I was born (my grandmother and two great aunts) still lived on C Street in Feltonville in North Philadelphia, near Olney where my father had attended Olney High School. My mother's roots run to Elmont, Long Island, New York.

Through the course of my childhood, I learned a mentality not that different from a gypsy's— not being attached to material things, caring more about imagination and creativity than worldly status and material progress. If I did fantasize about being famous for my art, I never fantasized about being rich; the gypsy strain I had running in my blood had already shown me the impermanence of all material things. The reason Chimes ends with me rejecting my father is that what he attempted to impose on the young gypsy was too severe— the need to conform absolutely to what his chosen image of me was. It was an image against unbridled creativity— an image bent towards a stable, solid life-path, which could and would not be mine. Chimes makes many detours— towards rock music and musicians, poetry, movies, locales I found inspirational when young— but the central algorithm is to demonstrate how the human mind acquires the tools it needs to lead a creative life. If these tools are sharply drawn and defined here, I have succeeded.

PUBLICATION CREDITS

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#1

I remember chimes. They were a swirl and eddy above a yellow door. Swaying happened and a noise and a rocking of wind; I was alive to light. I did not say, but was; I was not is, but being. There was a window opposite that was a rectangle and a flood of blue. Light was piercing it in beams and it was a movement and a lingering. I noticed the music of things, even then. I noticed that there was music not only in the chimes but in colors set against one another, yellow and blue and the white arms of the crib and in a moment I could taste them all together. I experienced moments as a kind of eating: I was hungry and I did.

#2

An iron on my feet was a big burning; a TV was a big noise but my noise, my burning noise, was bigger. My Mom rocked me in a small kitchen that was a mess of edibles, non-edibles, things that were there because we could use them. Soon there was a scar and it stayed there for a long time, I would look at my foot and remember the burn and be pleased; in the scar I had kept it, I had encased it in my flesh, it subsisted. Continuance was an excitement and a way of still existing. Sudden balloons of joy erupted often from faded pain.

#3

Tookany Creek shone of moonlight lavished on it from a sky that stretched over our big backyard. I stood at the window and it was late and I looked at the creek and it was a kind of song. I thought it was a dream and I thought that this was dreaming but I stayed there at the window and there was a shed in the backyard, it was blue like our house, but with white shutters and it was there for no purpose but as something between me and the stream that shone white and black from the moon. I stood at a level with my window and the stream made a rushing rustling noise and it was speaking to me and I listened.

#4

Father, my father, was there and he was fixing my window with special nails and I said I didn't like them and he said *they don't like you either*. First my father was there in the house and he was picking up a spilled scrambled egg with his foot and saying *handy foot* or then he was at a picnic table in the yard with lots of big people on a sunny day and much smiling but that was soon over. Much was soon over and I knew what over meant in a young way and I sang into a tape recorder with over happening in the background. There was still hearing after over was over and after everything was over I went back to a room inside myself meant for continuation and continuing continued, and had not to ever end or be over.

#5

I was in my room that was a world and that looked out on Tookany Creek. What I heard listened to, playing my father's records on my turntable, was the sound of the sun coming through the window. The scene was set to a place that was not world, was entirely of itself, was a piece of another world and yet was in my world whenever I wanted. I wanted and wanted the music, and the sound was all around me and I wanted things that would let me sound like this world in my world, which was of me. I began hearing what I saw in Tookany Creek and eating moonlight in my ears.

#6

We had to go to an ugly place to see Grandma Bubba: a big dirty street with no trees. There were people beaten and bloody and there were policemen but still I would leave Bubba's house and hang out in the lot with dirty children. They had firecrackers and they accepted me because I did not judge them but still I was me and they were who they were. Once one of them came to Bubba's door to ask for money and Bubba said no and Bubba was blind and poor and her sisters were poor too. Bubba was blind and smoked cigarettes and made dirty jokes that I didn't understand. The ugly place was there and never changed.

#7

Our house on Mill Road was a two-story wooden twin painted sky blue, placed on a curving block on the bottom of a steep hill, and was itself on an incline. The wide backyard, where was a large wooden shed also painted sky blue, and which fed onto a gravel path and then down another incline into Tookany Creek, was set sharply lower than the front door and then Mill Road beyond it, while across the street shone the side face of another hill, on which began the houses on Harrison Avenue. The effect of this portion of Mill Road was seclusion, intimacy, and rusticity— it looked very much like a nineteenth, rather than a twentieth century innovation. The moon above Mill Road was secluded along with us, coaxed into a space privatized by immersion in a world apart from the rest of Elkins Park, Cheltenham Township, Philadelphia, and the wider world. That emotion, of being apart from things, was blended into harmony or moodiness, exultation or melancholy, by the song of the creek and its currents. Though my block eventually intersected with Church Road, where there was more worldliness, traffic, and a general sense of movement, what echoed in me on Mill Road was a way of being alone, of being private. I had no siblings. No surprise that the house was haunted by strange ghosts, strange ghosts and echoes. I awoke once covered in spiders and they were dancing and I couldn't get them off. Also a big round white light came into my second floor window, it shone there and dazzled me and screamed and my Father told me it was a police searchlight and I believed him but he was wrong. I can see the light today and what it was doing was charging me and I was being prepared to serve in a kind of army and I am serving in a kind of army now: the light knew. I screamed out of pained recognition when I saw it and that was a spirit that haunted the house. Other echoes shone off the surface of Tookany Creek, which soothed but was itself of another world that was faraway and deep and that I couldn't reach even when I waded in it.

#8

What drew me both to play baseball, and follow professional baseball, was an instinct. The drama and excitement of the game was enticing to me. When you play a game, you become more-than-you; you turn in an engine which develops into more than the sum of its parts. The kings of baseball were masters of a certain kind of reality, bearers of a certain kind of wisdom, and holders of a certain kind of knowledge. The trick was a simple one: to face confrontation boldly, no matter what. To dare yourself, also, to understand, that a life with nothing risked is no life at all. So, as a little prince of CAA baseball, I dared to face whatever pitcher was at hand, bat in hand. It laid down a gauntlet for the rest of my life: when you reach a precipice, if you have the nerve, jump. And I did.

#9

What I found in school was a world too slow, too drab for my tastes. What it meant to have a teacher was to have an adult standing over you, directing your actions, playing to be obeyed, and obeisance did not come naturally to me. The corridors of Myers Elementary School were long, high-ceilinged, and oddly shaped; Myers itself was odd, as a labyrinth of weird spaces, and in my moments of freedom there I communed with a structure which was to my taste. In class, I vented a sense of pent-up rage by making jokes, and when other kids laughed I found myself riding a high I later found in baseball, music, theater, parties, girls—anywhere ordinary consciousness could be raised above average, where you could transcendentalize past norms. It was a way of being on fire. I got used to disciplinary action against me, to being a semi-reprobate; but the high I got from class-clowning, and from wildness in general, was potent, fiery, and high-ceilinged in and of itself.

#10

I brooded through summers of playing ball and lemonade and behind Mill Road, behind Tookany Creek was a Little League field, and I would play there. I would play and bigger kids would come around on bikes and I would be threatened and there would be a few others with me. We would play until we were too spooked to play, because the teenagers were acting funny and we didn't know then what a stoner was or about strange peppery smoke or about what happens to people on acid, and we were scared of the noises and the smells and the cars and the headlights at sunset when playing stopped being fun anyway because the ball could hit you on the head.

#11

O what does the music mean but not mean when you are so small that you have no defense against it? Riding in a car and a voice said *touch if you will my stomach, see how it trembles inside*, and it was strange but more violent than a body of water, even one that moved, and the voice was of me but not yet, because there was something in the voice that knew me (and anticipated me) without me knowing it, and it was a voice that danced and it meant heat hot heat hot heat.

#12

I was in the bathtub and I said my name over and over again until I forgot myself. The lights in the bathroom were on but I went deeper and deeper into darkness, and an empty void, and I heard my name as a something foreign. I heard my name, and I truly was not, I was a null and a void, null and void, and I had no self to be. Then, slowly, I regained myself, but I did not forget the essential emptiness, the uncompromising NO that I found behind the quotidian YES of selfhood. This happened also riding in a car to Aunt Libby's, and listening to the radio I thought NOTHING ANYWHERE until NOTHING got so big I shut my mind down in fright, and my consciousness streamed mellower.

#13

My father was then in an apartment. I loved the apartment because it was small and different from the house and I could listen to cars late at night. I could listen to cars after watching baseball on a little black and white Panasonic and I was on a couch and it was comfortable and different and I loved my father for being apart from the house and what usually was. There were Steak-Ums in the apartment and a china bull and many times we went to see the Phillies play because it was important to have fun and for my father to be my father and do what that meant. I even once rode on a motorcycle driven by my father's friend and held on tight but the wind was almost too much. My father was almost too much too because he was so apart from the much that always was in me.

#14

There was decay so that my Mom and Dad could not even talk. I met people in suits that were called lawyers and who had cold offices downtown and who asked me questions about what I wanted. I had no choice but to choose so I learned that life was about choices that you can't look back from, can't take back, can't do anything about except to move fumbling forward from, and I moved fumbling forward from choices. Now there was another Mom and Dad to go with the first two, but there were too many Moms and Dads and I was too alone and when I stared into the bathroom mirror, or any mirror, I saw that I was very far from what I had seen in the creek, the moonlight, the night, the stillness.

#15

O, for American summers of ice cream, basketballs, hot dogs, softball fields. On three special weekends a summer, day camp became sleepaway camp, before I had been to sleepaway camp. We sat on picnic tables on Friday afternoons, after the rest of the camp had departed, waiting for the fun to begin, and our sleeping bags had been deposited in the Rec Hall. It was in the air then for me, and on the sunny Saturday mornings that followed: a sense of absolute, boundless freedom. Looking out over the fields, the archery range, the equipment shed, and back up to the rock path at the foot of the Rec Hall's steps, the day glistened inside and around us, a feast of gracious gifts. If we could inveigle a counselor to supervise, we could use the swimming pool, maybe (if he or she were mellow enough) for hours. The pool itself was up and around the corner from the Big Top pavilion, where the other counselors fired up tunes on their boom-boxes and gossiped about the night before, less ecstatic than us to be here in Norristown. Many times, I claimed the equipment shed as a personal fiefdom, so as to organize massive, junior-professional softball games. Everything was trundled out to one of the two fields which was separated only by a wire fence from narrow, curvy Yost Road, and more empty fields on the other side of it, which I often stared at, entranced at a young age by nature spirits without being consciously aware of it. Counselors played with us, including CITs (Counselors-in-Training), and the context required us to cut heads— if you weren't good enough, you couldn't play. Later, down all the fields I ran, shirt tucked into shorts, playing capture the flag. Or, there I sat at the campfire, being told scary stories, feeling the magic of a small clan huddled, marshmallow soft (as the smores we cooked) in that realm: *camp*. Eventually I discovered sex, my sex, through the knowledge of a little girl who saw a big man in me. She held my hand and kissed me, and it was a deep wave of knowledge that left forever aftershocks rattling my walls with fire and thrill, frisson. Those lips were tender, were fevered, were forever cleaved to me in my imagination after that one night outside the Dining Hall, which was suddenly far away as Neptune. There was a brooding and a bittersweet and a knowledge of what can be achieved when two poles of being meet in the middle to kindle sparks. I held on to it.

#16

Suddenly there was a school that was a bigger school. There were lockers and a sense of importance; a combination to remember that was only mine. There were faces that were unfamiliar and a feeling that things were forming. I was always on the telephone because real dialogue happened on the telephone away from the presence of intercessors. I was always on the telephone because what was forming was a group that was not for everyone and I was in it. The group of us that was not everyone had rules that must not be spoken. What must be spoken was all the ways in which we were all moving forward. Moving forward meant being big and bigger and bigger, knowing more secret knowledge, occult practices of the teenagers we were trying to be. It did not mean the fullness that I still saw in Tookany Creek. Now, every day was regimented around who could talk to who, and how. The new school, more straightforward architecturally than Myers, had long narrow hallways with uncarpeted linoleum floors, and tended to be dimly lit. The journey from class to class was an adventure of seeing what new faces there were and discovering what they meant. My new friends would talk to me and not others. Alex, especially, formed myself and others around him as though we were a shell. Once the formation was established, as I was encouraged to dress how they dressed and say the things they would say, I understood that a kind of circuitry around us was closed. Tookany Creek ebbed and flowed, mutated, gurgled, or froze, given what the weather conditions were, but we were more hardened. In the parlance we used then: we were cool. Alex was tall, medium build, and imposing. He had been around Europe and Puerto Rico and was worldly. He knew how to be and stay cool. We talked on the phone every night. I was being cultivated. The clique was Alex's fiefdom. I had none. When I was over Alex's house, I picked up his white Fender Stratocaster and remembered all the records I used to listen to, how I'd wanted to play music. I wondered if I ever would. My problems with obeisance showed up again: I could not obey Alex, or the rest of the clique, the right way. I wanted to be more free. But it took time, the length of an entire year at Elkins Park Middle School, for this to be acknowledged and assimilated. For then, I held the axe, postured, and let an enormous question mark sail out of my consciousness and off into the air, before making my way down to the party in the unfinished basement, where Alex held court.

#17

Hypnotized by the wholesomeness of what had come before, I couldn't relate to being cool. The group threw a party at my house— the larger one, on Harrison Avenue in Glenside. The lines were clearly drawn— it was my house, but it was their party. The night of the party, I felt misplaced. I was in, but in such a way that I was supposed to know the special coordinates of just how I was in, and also the coordinates of what I'd failed to achieve yet. If I was in all the way, which I was not, it would've been my party too. All these divisions and precisions, amidst ten and eleven-year-olds, left me with a feeling of weariness. I didn't understand why a group like this had to be so structured, so sculpted, or why competition and backbiting had to be so fierce. Mythology bothered to attach itself to Harrison Avenue— one of the top kids, an ultimate arbiter of coolness, locked himself in the den bathroom, pissed at a flirtation which was developing. I stayed on the crest of the wave, playacting like everyone else. The drama coalesced in a series of heated confrontations, in both den spaces. I was there to register who was messing with who. Yet it wasn't right. It was all hammed up nonsense about consolidating a pecking order, who had authority to say what to whom. A natural libertarian, I chafed against the Victorian constraints of social discipline and propriety being imposed. It was no way for an eleven-year-old who was free-spirited, punkish, not tethered to any masts, and unimpressed by tethered-to-the-mast lifestyles, to live. A comb disappeared permanently from the upstairs den bathroom. Another arbiter kid put on some of my father's boxing equipment, and cracked a poster's glass case. The dour portion of the Township, and the attendant School District, would soon find out a disappointing truth— I had no allegiance to staying in this particular ring. I would just as soon fly free, and not worry about the Machiavellian manipulations of a bunch of pre-adolescents, pumped full of illusions and primed by fanged parents. The sense that this party would or could be the highlight of my young life was pure tosh. The drifting away, here, Roberta notwithstanding, would be sweeter than the living through. Fare thee well. So: I saw through what I saw through, I couldn't articulate it but I tried, and because I tried they called me a fool. I was a fool for caring and wanting to share and thinking that everything should be spoken out loud: real. I was a fool for being awkward when I should've been confident and confident when I should've been awkward. I kept trying to keep up for a while, I wore Benetton and Ton-Sur-Ton, I wore a blue and pink Swatch, I had more parties, but still it was all wrong, wrong for me, wrong to have my mouth forced shut by cool protocol, or any protocol at all. I was an artist, before I was an artist.

#18

Subconsciously, I held fast to the axiomatic, self-schematic belief which forms the backbone of most highly intelligent people: you don't believe others, you believe yourself. This was necessary, as it would be later when I was ready to face the wider world: tensions were mounting. It was not unnoticed that I failed to react to the Harrison Avenue party as though it were an event for me. The group wavered in relation to me, picking me up and then dropping me again. I fell in love with one of them, Roberta, who symbolized my struggle with "cool." This was because for all her vaunted coolness, the iciness of her exclusivity, which manifested whenever she was forced to reckon anyone too socially lowly for her, an intelligent soulfulness shone out from her, and generated sparks. I could not help but recognize this intelligence, and see in it something and someone kindred. Sultry even at a young age, a lank-haired brunette, built sturdily enough to play serious tennis, I was warmed by what in her might be cultivated. The ice and the fire in Roberta's soul did furious battle, and I would always attempt to put in a good word: stick to the warmth, stick to the warmth. My success was intermittent, at best. Neither Roberta nor anyone else around her would admit that she had fallen for me too, but she had. I, myself, fought with my sense of knowing this. After all, and willy-nilly, I could never be, as was obvious at a certain point, really in. In meant fluency in projecting an ice-wall; it also meant contrived reactions and equally contrived posturing. The group itself had a self-schematic axiom: for those of us cool enough to be in, we sacrifice all else in our lives to stay cool enough to remain in. This, I was utterly unwilling to do. Did they find the sacrifice worth it? In any case I was a slave to Roberta's gaze, which went many ways, and was a burr in my side because she had no mercy. It was not to be. I was in love and it gave her an excuse to taunt which would relieve her pain, which was not an artist's pain and unacknowledged, and so taunts became the taut tensions of my everyday existence, and I bore up as best I could but I was only considered cool "in a way." Because I had not formed, I wanted what was outside of me; I needed my own help. I coveted Roberta's patina of blood and chocolate: that ooze.

#19

Over the years of my early childhood, my feeling about Feltonville never changed. There was an ugliness to it which could not be maneuvered around—it was not of me. I was to learn, later in my life— this was, in fact, who my father was. It was not just that for most of my childhood, he taught at Clara Barton Middle School, within a few blocks of C Street where he grew up. It was that this landscape, its sense of deprivation, of brutishness, was precisely my father's inner landscape, too. My father was a man who liked to fight— both when it was necessary to fight, and just for sport. He viewed his life as a series of potentially lethal confrontations. His method of dealing with hindrances was to bully his way through them, as though everything was a lead-in to jungle-law and might-makes-right. The class transition he made, from working class into the middle of things, was hardly a smooth one. He could not be genteel the right way. He taught wood shop. That level— wood— something tactile, something solid, which did not depend on the brain, or on emotions, for its subsistence— was one he did feel comfortable with. Forced to deal with intangibles— thoughts, emotions— and at an angle where he would have to extend himself to really understand— my father fumed with resentment. C Street retained its working class integrity for him— a context in which who you are was equivalent to how well, how fiercely, you could fight, and starting very much with the physical, humans as physical mechanisms. Reduced to anything spiritual, C Street could only be derisive. Salt of the earth, these people called themselves, except to say that absolute spiritual and emotional denial was always unimpressive to me as that. Bubba, it turns out, was in trouble. She couldn't even see shapes anymore. She made it clear, at a certain point, that she felt she had taken her life as far as it could go, and wanted out. "It's back to square one," I heard her say. My father, once again in the false position of spiritual advisor, had little to say back. He liked to build Bubba up, as someone who had kept his family together, but he was no one to soften or sweeten the blows which accrue to an individual life as it continues. You couldn't go to him for comfort. The situation of Bubba's desolation did, also, build itself up, and then did a hang fire routine for a while. Then, on a soft green spring day, I found my father at my mother's house. Bubba was dead, had jumped head-first from a second story window. She jumped because her partial blindness had become total. She had given many warnings which were not heeded. I looked at April blooming on Mill Road and thought of this and could not locate a center. Grass was green and the sun shone and I felt nothing even as I reached for a feeling. Suicide means you can't blame people for feeling nothing, though I did not think her culpable then or now. How I sat and listened to my father was by looking at his red Chevette, itself a remnant of Feltonville heritage, and mystifying myself.

#20

We were moving. This was to be the end of Tookany Creek as an active presence in my life. I felt Mill Road move into a new space in my mind for things that no longer subsisted, like Bubba. The new house, like Mill Road, was on a street that curved, and unlike Mill Road was of red brick. The houses on the opposite side of the street, which varied architecturally, formed (as was later grateful) a wall so that you couldn't see it, but Cheltenham High School loomed behind them, a humongous parking lot flanked on a far side by the building itself. When the CHS marching band practiced in the lot that autumn, I heard them, boisterous and bumbling. It went with the smell of red and yellow leaves burning. I had no presentiment at that time what CHS would wind up meaning to me. I had a new room on the second floor overlooking the street, and one streetlamp which looked haunting at night. As with Mill Road, few cars passed. The house had a second floor porch we didn't use much, and a stone slab first floor porch where we would sometimes eat dinner when the weather was clement. Mom threw parties there too, sometimes for new neighbors. This was a neighborhood she would be a part of, even if there was (it turned out) no special place for me. The bathroom was a special shade of yellow, as was the basement where the washer and dryer were. I didn't like the new house at first because it was new, it didn't look like Mill Road and my room was painted aqua like toothpaste and had a funny smell. The night we moved in I gorged myself on sweets and lay awake in pain for hours, the same that had happened at Bubba's wake. Then I became adjusted and Old Farm Road had its own place in the hierarchy of places that were, or were to be, more or less numinous, lit up with the religion of music and harmony, in my head.

#21

For a long time there was no sound that was my sound. Then one night, I was at my father's house, which was not Old Farm Road. Glenside, this Glenside, was posh, luxuriant. On the radio I heard a sound that I knew instinctively was my sound. It was resonant, sharp, and had echo; it sent reverberations out to the four corners of the earth; it would not be denied. The music began with a short phrase, a riff, played on a hugely fuzzed electric guitar. The riff, allowed to reverberate and fill a large, studio-generated aural landscape, was a thunderbolt shot down from Olympus. It tugged, as baseball did, at everything in me which was masculine, courageous, outrageous even, daring. When a human voice was heard, filtered in, intoning a harsh reprieve to an errant muse (*You need coolin', baby I'm not foolin'*), it could be heard as vibrantly raw or merely shrill, singing in a very high register. My own consciousness perceived nothing but the vibrancy of power: extreme, uncompromising volatility and nerviness. The drums filled out an expansively drawn landscape with even more authority, as though a tribunal of Greek gods had converged and were sending secret messages to me in Glenside, ensconced with headphones while my father watched TV impassively across the room. When the guitar spoke for itself, above the fray and accented by space made for it, it was a form of blues made sophisticated beyond blues I was familiar with: all the agony and bravado of blues guitar pushed into a space where more eloquence was required, to achieve a necessary release past overwhelming tension. The cascades of notes were not just a release: they were a hint and a missive sent to me about the possibility of ecstasy on earth, achieved nirvana, release from karmic wheels. The aural landscape was rocky, mountainous, and allowed the listener to climb from peak to peak with it. In short, it was a place I'd never seen, a miraculous place, with landslides clanging over other landslides so that no stasis or silence need be tolerated. I had to merge with the landscape, join it, become it. I would not be able to sit still unless I became one with this sound, until I could similarly reverberate. I needed to reach the four corners, the mountain peaks, along with it. This sound that began with a loud guitar, played hotly, showed me the world seen through an auditory prism of light and shade.

#22

Things shifted. I went from cool to killed-by-lack-thereof. In a period of isolation, I learned about reversals, about temporality and its ruthless one-handedness. I faded into a kind of wallpaper; the kids around me did not, perhaps, see me at all. Then, as winter changed into spring, things shifted again: friends appeared out of nowhere, I had a role to play that was substantial, exterior blossoms and blossoming things had an interior echo in my consciousness. I learned thusly how one must wait to be blessed, that patience is a virtue close to heaven, that all things are eventually answered by their opposites, if the soul is maintained closely. I learned that seasons have each a particular flavor and shape, like candy and snowflakes, and that each season must have a slightly different meaning.

#23

My first guitar was sleek and black and an Ibanez Road-star; my amplifier was small and black and a Peavey backstage. These were my appendages and I treated them as such. A day without substantial exercise was unthinkable; every new musical phrase was a mountain to climb and a chance to demonstrate the doggedness of an artist. I was dogged and I could soon make many noises that had the robust quality of reaching the four corners; what was important was that this was a kind of marriage. I wedded my guitar without ceremony because every moment was a ceremony that was holy and part of me. I was soon a musician and I could know no other way to be because this was ordained and my destiny. I had found one key to Tookany Creek, and it was in the process of moving my fingers artfully. As they moved, my heart beat in rhythm, my brain facilitated this and all things were joyous.

Now I had a sister who was half my sister, who was a baby and who I played with. My time was divided so that I was a brother half the time, when I was with my father and my other mother, who was not my mother. My life grew to have many compartments and I lost the cherished sense of continuity I had had, because things never continued. My life was splintered and I had more life than I should have had, and my world was an overcrowded subway car. All I could do (having chosen to be splintered) was ride the variegated waves as they broke around me, and my half-sister was a big wave and called me *Amio* and there was a big house they lived in that I was a visitor to and that was not precisely mine. All the same it was a big house and I had many friends that visited me at the house and there was a stimulating festive atmosphere that did continue for a while. The house was important—it taught me about luxury, what it meant to be pampered. My own, normal-sized, tan-carpeted bedroom was equipped with a black and white Panasonic television, of the kind no longer legal, too convenient, now. This meant that after a night out with my buddies, I could retire into bed, not to sleep, but to watch *Sprockets* and *Lothar of the Hill People* on *Saturday Night Live*. The gracious gift aspect of the TV being there also meant that on week nights, if I couldn't sleep, the TV would be there to keep me company, ease me into being restful. The den itself was equipped with a full-bar area— not relevant to me then, except as a place to sit when I would gab with, often, eventually, N on the phone, often for hours. It was a special space where my shenanigans with N couldn't disturb anything or anyone. Even if Dad was being predatory, the house was artfully spaced out and compositionally sound enough that I didn't have to be in the line of fire. He could pursue his rages and find other targets. Downstairs from the den, the finished basement was Den #2— a dartboard, a (by today's standards) primitive PC, with printer, and yet another spare bedroom hiding behind it. My friend, who was the beneficiary of this estate, once I at least owned shares of it and the shares were liquid, was Ted. We occupied the house— we rambled. The basement, Den #2, had a nice ambience to it at night. We used sleeping bags, burned incense, and listened to psychedelic music from the nineteen-sixties. If Dad was in the mood to pester, we had to tolerate. But he'd also bring us Philly-style steak sandwiches and fries from one of the better local delis, making up for his orneriness by offering up a Philly soul-food feast. Food he could handle. I was later to learn— the graciousness of the house, its sense of livability, of airy expansiveness, was typical of Glenside, over the rest of Cheltenham Township. Glenside liked, and still likes, to party. The larger houses, including Ted's, in other areas of Cheltenham like Elkins Park, had a sense of feeling dark, dingy, oppressive in comparison. Glenside could be spry. When it snowed, we took the sled right across the street to the Elementary School to ride the huge obstreperous slope it boasted— Easton Road was only a few blocks away. I was at the festive house two or three or four nights a week for several years. This, what was made of the custody battle. Otherwise, I was ensconced at Old Farm Road. And even as my father's presence, amid all the luxury, could only be an ominous one.

I learned what it meant to be torn in two by circumstance. What Sanibel Island was— a getaway resort for the high-society wealthy, with houses, on Seahawk Lane, filled with extraordinary amenities— was handed to me in a not-fortuitous package deal. I was this: the daughter’s husband’s son from a previous marriage. Nothing more, nothing less. I was not “in.” On this count, I was forced to plough through rough days, during which I was made to feel my expendability at all points. Yet I was moved, in a primordial way, by what Sanibel was as a tropical paradise. The palm trees radiated an extreme sense of luxuriousness. I watched a gecko lizard get chased, manhandled, and then let loose by a house cat. The main beach at Sanibel had sand dollars on a day-to-day basis, and I found and kept one. Ding Darling nature preserve had real gators and fleet after fleet of exotic birds. There were bars on Captiva where kids could sit and drink Shirley Temples and pretend they were knocking real drinks back. The whole Sanibel lifestyle was a seductive one— tennis in the morning, a court being one amenity provided by Seahawk Lane, then brunch, to see and be seen, at a swank bistro, semi-open air, with doors and windows thrown open. Afternoons could be spent poolside, all Seahawk Lane providing screened-in pools, reading and swimming. Dinner was the piece de resistance, and it was necessary to dress up for it. Phone calls had to be made; lists had to be consulted; plans might have to be shifted. Where you could eat was various, but this, more than brunch, was social call time, when high society swingers met in the middle of their money to impress, impose, injure, compliment, or deride the many others like them. There was theater at night, and art galleries. Beneath all the hullabaloo, there was nothing to worry about. Everything was taken care of. How you had the money you had was less important than just the facticity of its being there. You were either in or you weren’t. Logjammed into an inferior position, not there by a genuine family right, but good-looking, intelligent, and capable of being charming, I did my best to appear as in as possible. I was not shabbily treated by everyone on all sides. Yet, at the end of the day, the daughter’s husband’s son from an earlier marriage could not be to the manner born on Sanibel Island. The palms, the Atlantic Ocean, the sand dollars, and the birds and gators at Ding Darling cried out to me from a place of purity: being here, as a nascent child-of-nature, was a birthright. High society was more muddy, and mixed a muddy concoction for me to drink, which left me half-queasy. It was about the cult of faux relatives I was forced to endure. They made no bones: I was in *this far* and no further. I could only take what I was given and be halved.

The mountains had danger in them. I felt it all over my young, twelve-year old body as we unloaded our trunks, trudged over to our assigned cabin: 8. Right in the middle of an extended dusk on a clear June night, and with the encroaching shadows, overhanging foliage, impinging, densely packed woods, and the sense of unfamiliarity, all became a symbol of a precipice not yet gone over, a reckoning not to be assayed lightly, a battle for survival. Jason, also from Cheltenham, and I got settled in the cabin as quickly as possible. I chose an upper bunk in the cabin's far right corner (according to the cabin door), Jason a lower which flanked the cabin's left middle. His parents gone, we achieved the half-insanity of too much newness. Athletic equipment was scattered all over the cabin. Adults were, too— some counselors, some friends of counselors. One of the counselors, who mentioned he was only visiting, bothered to say, "Isn't Cabin 8 the Lady in Black cabin?" "Yes," another one, also just visiting, answered, "it sure is." Outside the cabin windows, light struggled haplessly to survive. "Who was the Lady in Black?" After all these years, it might've been Jason or I who asked, I don't remember. "The Lady in Black comes in the middle of the night to punish kids who don't do what they're told. Remember, kids, just be good." "Did you see her?" "I was here the year she showed up. She marched into this cabin two hours before dawn and walked right up to that bunk, right there." He was pointing, it so happened, top-back-right. My bunk. I felt my twelve-year-old consciousness heaved off the precipice I'd intuited was there. It all caved in on me at once, as my insides fell— the dark woods the Lady in Black issued from were a mystery, which spoke to me from a great height, in a language I was too young to understand. The woods knew— I would have to understand later. The sense of danger, in the woods, in the mountains, and in the synecdochic story of the Lady in Black, were about really getting, really knowing, your own smallness, in relation to nature. In relation, also, to the mountains themselves, and their strange progeny. The spirit of the woods themselves was a Lady in Black. Did she kill the kid, someone asked? "No, she just dragged him out of the cabin to her house. He came back the next day." I see. Yet the sense of delirious, swooning, fearful energy, on my first night in a haunted place, made it so I spent an hour on my bunk, recovering, and let Jason handle the intros.

#27

Our lives are conditioned by contingent factors, small and large, which shape and consolidate our perceptions. To make a long story short, how we perceive is conditioned heavily by what we have already perceived. Everyone's "spots of time" are peculiarly suited or unsuited to their own individual identity. I remembered something, when I encountered Wordsworth as an adult, that I knew would make sense to him as a tiny increment of time which made a large impression on my mind. The wooden cabin was rustic, realistically built, and cramped, especially to hold nine kids and two adults. Thus was formed the backbone of life at sleepaway camp. By the early morning hours, the two adult counselors had returned to their places and were also asleep. I awoke at maybe 2 in the morning one morning, from my position straight back and to the right, top bunk, to see a man standing stock still in the doorway of the cabin. The cabin's door was entirely open. There was nothing to light the man's face— his head was a well-outlined but nonetheless indistinct black blob. In the state I had of being half-asleep, I did not experience the impression of him, including black outlines, as a sinister one, but rather a vision of madness— of consciousness severed from reality, set adrift from the tactile in a land of amorphous shapes and sounds. The frozen man, swimming in the web of black shadows, was mad. Comforted, I fell back into complete sleep, which remained uninterrupted. The next day, I conveyed to others in the cabin what I had seen, but no one but me had been up for it. I was never able to solve the mystery of who the man was. Yet when I flash on the precise spot of time— a drowsy, half-asleep twelve-year-old at sleepaway camp sees, alone, something odd happen in the middle of the night— it is specifically about the odd things that people see, or the odd sights which are on offer among the human race when no one is, or seems to be, watching. The privacy of the vision— the contingency of the unlit face, seen indistinctly as a blob— more importantly, the mystery of whether the lunatic could notice from where he was standing that my eyes alone were, in fact, half-open— the perceived unpredictability of the lunatic's consciousness (why us? why this cabin?)— how preternaturally still he was— are all conflated with the sense that the vision is about all that happens in human life, hidden from view, which is most of it. We are forced to reckon an insubstantial surface most of the time. Beneath that surface, what is most real about the human race does its dance, which has much to do with madness, the middle of the night, and stillness intermixed with motion, as it did here.

A new school year was a new way of seeing and a new chance to move forward. I was sitting in a new class and on the other side of the class was a new girl. She was olive-skinned, had a dainty mouth and lustrous long black hair. Slightly exotic. The first time she looked at me, she smiled widely. It was a smile that had in it something strange— she seemed to already know me, and was already counting on me being hers somehow. I was stunned by her sense of self-possession, and even more stunned at how possessed I instantly felt. Even as a girl, she could move pieces around just by changing her facial expression. Dramatic. Our eyes shot into each other and intermingled. I was aware of something changing and something moving and before long I had her number (and she mine) and we were confidants and romantic dialogists chatting away afternoons and evenings. The unpredictability of our conversations veered over terrain usually untouched by children our age— the depth of souls, the sense of destiny built into human life, who was destined to make an impact, and love, who. The depth of N took for granted that love could be built from suffering, from trials and tribulations. The trials and tribulations she put me through were lightning bolts she would shoot at me, to make me aware that things were changing, or about to change. She was a mystic. Over the phone I played her the song called *Faith* that went *well I guess it would be nice if I could touch your body* and this had instant mythological significance as being a consummation of everything that subsisted between us. She cherished drama, in her dark-hewn, brunette way, and so there were peaks and valleys of understanding and frequent miscommunication, but the feeling of a continuous humming presence between us, of which we could partake, went on, as did the sense of her imparting priceless wisdom— here's who girls really are.

#29

Ted was a foil who could be leaned on and who liked to play straight man. I was a loon who needed a straight man, who would plan gags and make general mischief for teachers and those innocent enough to be duped. When we rambled through the house on Harrison Avenue, it was taken for granted we were a team, a Dynamic Duo on an expedition, the purport of which was to place us where we could have the fun we wanted to have. Ted and N learned to tolerate each other, even as N's flair for dramatics was less appreciated by him than by me. Ted and I had our own phone racket going, and, for amusement, might call anyone at any time. Phone expeditions, with us trading off as per who was on the line at what time, made it so we could feel the earth around us move, feel our power to change things. People's responses were always an adventure. Time, at Harrison Avenue, was never a constraint at all. We moved, in the clear, from call to call, looking for the right openings, fishing for the right articulations. In that great era, before cell and smart phones, the phone had an autonomy as something more real, more eventful, than it does now. The phone sat there, on the bar, for example, solidly beckoning us. Sometimes we meant it, sometimes we didn't, but we were mobile, we were moving. N experienced her nights the same way. Later, we wanted it to be atmospheric and ambient around us and we would burn my father's dhoop sticks and listen to rock music. This music came to symbolize the playfulness and the whimsy and the innocence and the elegance of what we imagined, of what we could articulate in our phone adventures, when the articulations came thick and fast. The overabundance of my life seemed rich at this time: there was continuance.

#30

Through music, words emerged in my consciousness as another thing. There were musicians who used words and they showed me. I saw that combinations of words could be molten and that the fires they ignited could be contagious. They could be a door that one could break through into another reality: a place hyper-real, full of things that had the palpable reality of what is called real, but were nonetheless better than real: voices channeled from ether, expounding heroic worlds of oceanic expansive experience. This was another way of moving fingers artfully; more subtle and durable, yet so much harder to do because so stark: mere imitation would get you nowhere. I was on the bottom of another mountain that would take me where the creek ran effortlessly.

#31

I saw a movie at this time that had a powerful effect on me. It was called *Apocalypse Now* and it was all about one man's interior world. This world had a cohesion made of short-circuited dynamism and it meant that green jungle, severed heads, napalm memories and the poetry of endings (bangs, whimpers) would have to be preeminent. I learned how internal cohesion is rare and a magnet that others are drawn to: the more coherence (even if it happens to be irrational), the more magnetism. Yet being a magnet meant drawing good and bad together; internal levels had to be minded, picking and choosing was not an option. Life and death were seen to be flip sides of a coin on a dead man's eyes. That was it: something compelled me to look death straight in the eye, as something interesting. The film had a way of making death, not attractive, but necessary, as a pivot point for the consciousness of the living. We, all of us, have to live our lives, thinking of, conceiving, our deaths. Kurtz takes this as a starting place, to use his life as an investigation about the possibilities of amalgamation, of death-in-life and life-in-death, and of the sense that the true manifestations of death or life do not ricochet without resonance with the other. The presiding river, dense forests of Vietnam sent their own resonance through me, as images, with what I had seen, the stark rawness of the Poconos— the woods at night, the night itself in nature's wilderness. What was closest to real life had also to be closest to real death. Kurtz was lost in not being able to differentiate, in seeing death in life and vice versa. Where I wanted to go, where I wanted to be, was with the maniac who had stood in the doorway of Cabin 8, past Tookany Creek— moving with stillness, stilled in motion, pursuing a solitary relationship with the night, the river, the forest, Kurtz, cohesive around the imperative urge to blend in to what was larger than me, to merge, to die into the life of the endless and boundless. That it was possible to die into a larger life, that perception, made, presaged, the consummation of my brain with language, with taking words out into spaces past even the forests and the rivers. Eternity was that marriage revealed.

#32

Images were entering my mind and leaving seeds. I saw a man dangle with hooks stuck into his chest. He was looking for visions and to become a channel for voices that would take him and his people forward. It was a ritual called *Sun Dance* and it was a kind of extremity. I learned that mortification of the flesh can be a boon to spirit and that valuing spirit can be more than an act of volitional faith: it can be a pact with another world. It was around me all the time, and around N, and Ted: that there were other worlds, whole and imminent. The visible world, the surface-level world, was not everything; was, in fact, not that real. You could dig, both into yourself and into those around you, and find yourself in a place Other—realms and vistas opening into alternate realities. You could become a channel, and manifest energy from elsewhere to enliven the dullness of the everyday. When N and I, on the phone, entered our wonted trance state, our brains fused, and what came through us together were sparks taken from somewhere far away, somewhere out in space. Our own *Sun Dance* ritual was by no means as drastic as what was shown in *A Man Called Horse*, which I watched with the other kids. But brain-fusion, and sense of the imminence of ethereality, became a feature of my day-to-day life once N and Ted were in place. We were mystics together. It was not volitional that I witnessed the *Sun Dance* ritual, but it was volitional that I embraced it and that a chord was struck within me. The receiver of visions could hold a place of honor; whether I saw what I saw in a creek or an Ibanez or a pen, or N, the kind of seeing I was attuned to could move people from where they were to another place. Human consciousness was, or at least could be, transportable.

#33

I liked the festive aspect of celebrations, and the little adventures one could set loose at a party: running wild, smashing things, drinking forbidden alcohol. Driven by a delirious continuance, I put my hands all over girls' bodies. I prodded, pinched, teased, respectful yet prolonging the experience any way I could. My will dovetailed with a wanted continuance and I was precocious: jacket off, tie loosened, a little wolf. I learned how to ride a high and how to direct cohesive energy into a palpable magnetic force. At a festivity on the top of a Center City skyscraper in April '89, on an immense rectangular outdoor porch bordered by chest-high railings, I looked down to see, a great distance beneath me, an empty street, what I would later know as Sansom Street. I was talking to a momentary companion about my philosophy of life as not a game of chance but a game of daring. "Look," I told her, "watch." I took a wineglass I'd stolen while the adults in the indoor festivity area adjacent were not watching, and heaved it over the railing. She rolled her eyes, but, as I could not help but notice, I got away with it. Wherever the glass had crashed, and the resultant shards, were invisible to my eyes. Nothing happened. I wouldn't be henceforth carted off to reform school. I had been daring, riding on my luck, and I succeeded. Just as, at a birthday party at the Greenwood Grille, I snuck another wineglass out of the restaurant into the tunnel connecting one side of the Jenkintown Septa station to the other, and smashed it down in some kind of compactor unit. But on the top of the skyscraper, looking out over the baroque, well-balanced Philly sky-line, a seed had been planted which I hadn't noticed. What the city was, in contrast to the suburbs, was as invisible to me as the rogue glass-shards then. I was destined to learn that a spirit of adventure was one thing in the 'burbs, but could be pushed out and developed much further in the city, where crowds of interesting people could always mean interesting action. As we turned back into the main festivity area to shake off the April evening chill, I had a calm sense of being in tune with the cosmos. I picked up a spare Kahlua, and drank it.

#34

My entire childhood, I enjoyed the stillness of houses in the middle of the night, when everyone was asleep. There was comfort there— everyone was still around— but also, as I discovered, a sense of freedom, invisible in the daytime. Consciousness became more fluid; perceptions widened; and all kinds of receptive sensitivity sharpened and honed themselves. The house in Mahopac where I had relatives was unassuming; yet I was sometimes able to tune in to a wavelength frequency there about oneness, states of unity, a sense of indissoluble bonds fastening together the perceptible world. One night, me and a bunch of other kids were asked to sleep in my cousin Camilla's wood-floored, white-paneled, rectangular bedroom. Camilla had a fish-tank I hadn't noticed much, set against the far wall, next to the raw, grained wooden door. I woke randomly in the middle of the night, while the rest of the house slept— set on a mattress with another girl-child I didn't know much, next to Camilla and her friend sprawled on the bed beneath a white comforter, elevated above us. At first, I was slightly irritated. But as I watched the fish swim around the tank, and listened to the mild hum the fish-tank made, I was not only mollified, I was entranced. The hum and the movement of the fish became a dynamo, a manifestation-in-motion of perfect peace, of a state of being completely covered by nourishing waters. I didn't sleep much the rest of the night. I was somehow able to rivet myself to paying rapt attention to a kind of symphony, being performed specially for me. The crescendo of the symphony transpired just as the dawn began to break. The stillness of the house ricocheted against the hum of the tank and the moving fish until I reached the apex of consciousness my young mind could reach. I was completely safe, yet completely free nonetheless. I dreaded the thought that anyone in the house would move. As had to be tolerated, the sun manifested, and feet began to shuffle in the hallway, breaking the magic spell. But Mahopac had an uncanny clarity for me of allowing moments like this to happen. I thought of these things, as I was riding in a train to Mahopac to visit my relatives. It was an endless classic day in the endless classic summer of '89. The train broke down and I was sequestered in it for hours, again slightly irritated at first. There was no one in my car; I took out my guitar and began to play. I had a sensation of Otherness from being in an unfamiliar place, a place strictly liminal. I learned for the first time, there and then, the magic of places that were not my home, were not destinations, and were in the middle of something. Though I couldn't feel the sunlight directly, there was warmth and a charm to the circumstances that I appreciated. It was the Mahopac wavelength frequency again. Travel could help me to channel; Otherness could rejuvenate one's interior world; mishaps could be gateways to other realities.

Because we are not only subjects but objects of perception, the subject's mind must bend towards an uncomfortable reality—the necessity of imagining our own objectivity. We must imagine how we are seen by others. If the mind takes pleasure in doing so, it is because another's experience of us is of something profound, special, important. I played in a softball game at a camp, whose name I did not learn, over an hour away from ours. I noticed that some kind of festival was going on. People, with painted faces and balloons, were strewn in groups around the campground. I had a rush of intoxication as I stood in center field—owing, I thought, to being surrounded by carnival sights. I learned, many years later, that there was another reason. Roberta Hirst, from Cheltenham, and from a camp only a few miles down the road, and which I assumed was on the other side of the Poconos and thus perhaps ten hours away, stood in a semi-conspicuous crowd watching me, from an odd, to me invisible, angle. That rush of intoxication was about Roberta, and what might have happened for us in a better world—freed from the shackles of a self-cannibalizing community, we could submit to the intense waves of romantic anguish we experienced for each other. Our bodies and our souls could touch. In this situation, the intense waves of romantic anguish were a torment only to Roberta. It says what it needs to say about her that she stood (I understood later) at the odd angle she did to me so that the status quo might be maintained, and our would-be marriage remain unconsummated. As she stood at thirteen, in the midst of the camp's carnival (a one-day, one would think), a butterfly painted on either cheek, she becomes the object of perception for me she could not be then. I know that love, hate, duty, and propriety are mixed uncomfortably and unevenly in her. She cannot run from, or embrace, love. She is frozen in the face of it. There is no freedom in her soul at all. Her sharp mind is starved by a life where too much is dictated to her, too fast. She stands—takes a few steps towards the ball field—steps back again. Pushes and pulls. After a few innings of watching me in center field (the odd angle is a secure one), she and her group migrate to another resting place in the carnival. I see her back now, in a way I could not then, made limber by the mountain air and wilderness spaces, almost ready to submit with me to the crucial feast. Almost.

#36

I did not belong at camp anymore but I was still there. There were few happy moments but they all involved solitude. One night everyone had gone to a dance but I stayed behind. It started to rain furiously, a preternatural pounding such as you find in the mountains in summertime (and these were the Poconos). The rain was coming down and lit me up with magic. I put in a cassette of a band called the Cure. The music was thick, viscous, gothic, and had rain and woods and darkness in it. Everything coalesced and my solitude in a wooden cabin in the rain was perfect. A world unfolded then, and opened for me— it was about nature's dynamism, nature's combustibility. Sheets of rain pelted the circle of cabins, set on a semi-drastic hill. The circular turf which constituted the middle ground or middle area, with the flagpole at the center point, was buried beneath the onslaught. The entire spectacle forgot me perfectly— I stood outside it. The ominous Cure tune was about that darkness, of being forgotten by natural forces which could only overpower the individual. The sheets pummeled everything— into the ground, into the trees. The cabin was solid, enough that I felt protected. I could observe all that natural mightiness without getting crushed by it. The cabin and the music seduced me into a trance state. I was not caught out in it— I was lucky. A British counselor, drenched but spirited, heard the Cure and stopped to commiserate and someone foreign affirming my taste was good, added to the ambience of the moment. I saw that perfect moments must be self-created to stick. What would be generated for me (dances, sports, entertainment), from the surface-level world, would not suffice.

The final insignia bequeathed to me by the camp realm: our bunk went camping, a few hours from the camp, deeper into the Pocono mountains themselves. This meant seeing something visionary—the roads, the highways, the flatlands version of the Pocono mountains. It was about isolation—for every rest-stop, there would be a twenty-minute lull, with nothing on the roadsides at all. The hills and mountains loomed over the roads, setting in place the commanding position which mother nature held in relation to the human race here. The highway spaces had dense woods on either side of them. We were even able to stop at a roadside McDonald's, but my mind reeled at what it must have been like to settle and live here, to have this McDonald's as a habitual hang-out place, or place of occupation, as the terse teenagers behind the counter did. When the natural dwarfs encampment areas, like this one McDonald's, where we all got and consumed the customary stuffs, it creates a dynamic against language, against moving forward by speaking. Nature wins, and that's that. We could've been on the moon, except to say that our human brains were imbibing exactly what the suburbs denied—the existence, around the human race, of the absolute sublime, and of sublimity forcing back our stunted attempts at imposing on the natural. The sublime denies the human, denies language, denies situations the human race creates to demonstrate momentum. We got where we were going, that early evening, by climbing up a seemingly endless hill. We set up our sleeping bags in a secluded campground area. After a few cursory, desultory attempts at lighting a fire (our counselors being no more advanced at this than us), and long after sunset, we went to sleep. In the middle of the night, I was woken with a harsh push. Baptiste, from France, had a pack of Gauloise cigarettes. For us men of daring, it was now or never. Baptiste laughed at our stunted attempts at sophisticated inhalation—yet it didn't matter. For me, my first cigarette was an extension of acting, playing my guitar or baseball, and all the class-clowning I had down in school. I joined a continuum larger than myself, into a consciousness of bigness, expansiveness, largesse. I was attempting, without knowing or being aware of it, to translate the sublimity of the natural vistas opened around me, and us. I had accepted a token the universe, nature, and Baptiste had offered me, to reiterate what I already knew—somewhere out there was a real life waiting to be had, and the life was mine for the taking, if I dared.

#38

I often remembered kindergarten: we would nap on the second floor of a two-story schoolhouse, and every day I would be unable to sleep, hoping to fall through the floor and land on ground level. On the last day of kindergarten I thought to myself, *this is the last chance, if I don't fall through today I never will*. I didn't, and it was my first experience of imagination being disappointed by concrete reality. Now, with words and music, I saw that I could build an imaginative world in which I could always fall through the floor. It would be a place of light and laughter and play and others would be invited in. I was aware of a new hunger for which this world was the only appeasement, and the world of sports and grades and television that surrounded me was but a dim reflection of it. My guitar and my books had grandeur that cast a shadow over everything and everyone that was ordinary or broken.

#39

It was hidden in my gut— something I felt, but was unable to define for myself. A sense of the sublime, which took physical elevation and made it metaphysical. Like in Cabin 8, it was *that* thing— the imposition of nature's largesse on a receptive individual, who was nonetheless forced to acknowledge their respective tininess— implanted like a booster shot, under my skin. This was how I registered the Catskills. Like at sleepaway camp in the Poconos, and unlike the Philly 'burbs, everything here was only allowed to exist if a harmonious bond was forged with nature. The human race could not live against nature here. The Catskills, where lived several friends of my family, I found warmer than the Poconos, less about spooks. Maybe. The air itself always answered my brain with a sense of mystery. When the air, charged with mystery, not menace, I hoped, seemed to move, a part of who I was fell away, and was replaced with a phantom sense of otherness. We sat in the humongous, ranch-style bungalow, antiques strewn about as athletic equipment had been at camp, and I noticed the conversation did not levitate with the air pressure. Crystals were a fetish in Woodstock, and this family displayed their wares. They were oracles, it was said. The walls of the room were full-length windows, on one side, and in the darkness all that was visible was a brief plot of shrubbery. I picked up one of the larger crystals and fingered it. I was looking for a metaphysical channel to open; I wanted my sense of otherness explained to me. I found something else. It was here, in Woodstock, New York, that I met a famous writer, relative of these family friends. I sat beside him and listened to him discourse: drunkenly, cynically, and brilliantly. He took me on a tour of an imaginative landscape that he had created; it was all music and language and he had been rewarded with fame but no money. I saw in a flash that to build the world I envisioned, I would have to give things up. The practical world could be a problem; as with this livid specimen, my giant wings might keep me from walking. My vision, if it was to continue, might take away evident signs of success and accomplishment, outward significations of approval that most people depended on. Not being normal would be a blessing and a curse. Something oracular issued from the crystals after all.

#40

I got a high from theater and from being onstage and I did many theater things in school. I was given starring roles because I was able to self-transcend and be other people effectively. Sometimes, in rehearsal, a mood would overtake me of complete giddiness, which was like being on a magic carpet. I was so completely beyond myself that I had ceased to be myself; a solid Otherness cohered in my consciousness. It was a way of flying and of being in an enriched world that had safety and surprise, stability and excitement, in it, simultaneously. I was Mortimer, in *Arsenic and Old Lace*, and there was a body in the window seat. What it meant to me to be someone else was that Mortimer was a gift to wear on top of myself, or a sword to bear of who I was which was more than just me. Every time I spoke as Mortimer, I made a choice and decided who he was: I composed. My dear ladies composed with me, and every coloration they made was made to resonate with my own colorations of inflection, movement, carriage, physiology. We would be fun to watch because who we were together, as an engine working with a script, forced us all to self-transcend and be a living, dynamic tapestry. Theater itself was an engine churning out archetypes, giving people swords to play with, gently or with great ferocity, and broadening the scope of human comprehension. When, during a performance, Martha forgot one of her lines, I crept out on a limb and improvised us out of the jam. Theater was a game to take that value: helpfulness and cooperation: and transcendentalize it into something not just a sine qua non, but the ultimate protective sword for groups of people, casts. That way, the giddiness and the magic carpets could continue ad infinitum, and safety and surprise comingle.

#41

On the way to London I picked out a book to read called *The Catcher in the Rye*. The flight was red-eye but I began to read and couldn't stop. I was reading a story of myself, of another me who was magically on a series of pages. Holden Caulfield was me and his words were born of something that I could rightfully call my own. Oppressed by phoniness, harangued by clueless authorities, spinning through a maze of arbitrary circumstances, we flew over the Atlantic and were together. For the first time, a book had given me the gift of myself, and I found myself closer to me. I read straight into my hotel room, straight into a dream-extension of what I read, and words had demonstrated to me again their coherence and potentiality for continuity. Maybe I, too, could give people back themselves.

#42

Cheltenham was a creepy town in the Cotswolds, but I had to go there to see a family grave. We stopped for tea at a teashop called Sweeney Todd's, and they were playing the song that went *stop dragging my, stop dragging my, stop dragging my heart around*. The graveyard was by a big old Gothic-looking church. Cruel April had abated; the sun shone. I could not give a dead man back to himself but maybe if I tried he would listen. *There might be another world*, I thought this as I wrote a poem and placed it by the headstone. Words could be a source of continuance between our world and the land of the dead. They could have timeless life.

#43

As I walked around London, I had a camera on my person. We walked through Hyde Park; paused on a spot overlooking the Serpentine Lake. It coalesced into my brain— the word composition for such things not being in my head yet— that the way the lake looked in the mid and foreground, people seated on benches behind it, then more lawn, had a splendor or grandiosity to it, a sense of higher balance. I snapped the picture, and was initiated into the cult of the visual. This was mostly unconscious; only it turned out to be the universe's way of telling me that pictures and images, not just words and music, were to be part of my destiny and inheritance, too. For who I was at fourteen: my first work of genuine art.

#44

Words about music were another kind of music that could reinforce the ethos, pathos, and logos of the music. Music and words became indissolubly combined in my mind, and thus they have remained.

#45

N was the girl with the olive skin. We continued to dance around each other, loving but not committing ourselves. At a party at someone's house in Elkins Park, we went outside together and my hands were gripped by something and they went all over her. It was a big wave and it was coursing through me into her skin. I had no me, I was permeated by the feeling of two-in-one; the third that walked beside us took over. Yet, when I called the next day, N would not commit to it ever happening again, or even to continue going out. I had an intimation that this was to be my life: full of beautiful, difficult women. N was the first and an archetype that remains visible to me when I mate, or even meet, another beautiful, difficult woman that is for me. I have a muse, she is like this: recalcitrant and blue.

#46

A kind of madness would not let me focus only on N. There were other parties and other girls: always the same wave, frisson, feeling of two-in-one. I was even able to achieve this feeling with Roberta Hirst. When I slow-danced with Roberta at parties and dances, which had to be special— it didn't happen often— yet when it did, my hands on her waist created, for me, an internal overflow of scintillating electrical energy I was overtaken by. I channeled all of my emotional self into my hands, and felt— would've said if I didn't— a sense of submission, backwards moving electrical energy, on the other side, from her lower back. Our wave together was three minutes of intense ecstasy. It would take many years to learn that this wave, powerful as it was, was short-lived. But contact with the feeling of this wave had so much of bliss in it that I sought it out at every opportunity, and grew petulant when forced to live without it. It only seemed to work on girls that were beautiful; otherwise I felt nothing. Lack of control was desirable but led me into non-continuity. What echoes of Tookany Creek were in this feeling created a hunger that was not to be assuaged; unlike music and words, this wave could not be relied upon, and the focus I felt for music and words was dissipated here. It was my misfortune to learn that continuance, as applied to art, could actively detract from continuance in other situations and on other levels.

#47

Winter stars twinkled above another Recreation Center in Elkins Park. I had walked out of the party, dejected, deflated by too many ups and downs, social snafus. N had seen me making a blatant pass at someone else. Yet N and I were by no means officially an item. N was swinging on the swing set; I joined her. I wanted to commiserate with her at how superficial the whole thing was— people wearing masks, playing roles, no one being real with anyone else. I wanted to recalibrate my entire consciousness around N, and the state of sacred union, of oneness, we often achieved. I was unaware that N had seen the pass being made, not botched but only half-accepted. And, to her, a betrayal, of the sense of oneness we had together when we did our phone benders. N was always betrayed by the physical. So, she swung, under the eerie yellow-orange outside lights, weak against all the encroaching darkness, the parking lot and the stars. I noticed: she wasn't answering me the right way. I said, "Don't you think this party is...", and she cut in "no, I don't. I'm going back inside," leaving me to swing by myself. When I followed her in, in a few minutes, it was with the hollowed-out sense of having been broken, having seen oneness cut in half. There was the horror of it. The large, cavernous reception area led to several equally large, cavernous room spaces, empty, dark, and forbidding at this time of night, where I decided to spend a few minutes regrouping. Through an open door, I watched N make her usual party rounds. My date for the night was sequestered in one spot, and hadn't moved. I wanted to be somewhere else. Yet the demands of the evening required that I emerge and begin to do my own rounds. So, getting up my gets, I shut the door behind me (to all that wilderness) and walked straight over to the piano, where a bunch of random kids were huddled. The tunes I plonked out were simple ones, and I didn't sing along. I shyly approached my date and was evenly accepted. She had no heaviness for me the way N did, who would not speak to me for the rest of the night. But she liked her own body and the power it gave her. I myself should not, perhaps, have been a prisoner of the physical, but I was. I desired women physically in a way I could not hide. I wanted a shared oneness which was all-consuming. And my soul could only wish that there, under those stars, with light traffic rolling by on Old York Road, I could take N to the place where she might want what I wanted, and we could be all-consuming with each other, and nothing in us, physical or otherwise, could be anything but joined forever.

#48

That year, N wrote a long letter in my yearbook, that ended with *I love you*. I could sense, even then, that this *I love you* came from a much different place than other kids' effusions; this was a bittersweet testimony, not to placid or innocent attachment, but to strife, hardship, misunderstanding, piercing ecstasies and equally piercing sorrows. It was from an artist to an artist; it bore the stamp of aesthetic appreciation. N had reached down into the depths of her soul and her words had the weight of big breakers. I felt them land on me even as I tried to avert them. Yet, outwardly, we still wrestled; attaching, detaching, attaching again. What we wanted was freshness all the time, and each seemingly permanent detachment made coming together again more piquant. It was the friction of hard sex prolonged over time; we were more perverse and more subtle than we knew.

#49

N and I found ourselves involved in something a little evil. N introduced a third party into our equation, specifically to heighten tension, underline drama, mix things up. He was innocent of our perversity and did not know he was being used. N took great pleasure in playing Catherine Earnshaw; we were to fight fiercely for the honor of her favor. This we did; however, I turned the tables on her by withdrawing my pledged affection. I did this purely to add interest to a scenario that was too soap opera even for me. Blood had been spilt; the third party was wounded by all of these intrigues. Somehow this blood stained us, and we were left with stricken consciences. The total effect was to cut off the continuance of the pure waves that passed between us. The construct of our togetherness vanished for the time being, to be returned to (necessarily with less perversity) later.

#50

Through a strange process of mirroring, my Dad, also, found himself in a dalliance marked by perversity and thrill-seeking. He was disgruntled, living in a big house with a woman who had ceased to turn him on. The house was splintered; what began festively had now been abraded into a mere veneer of bourgeois success. Dad was on his own, pursuing a woman ten years his junior. She was married with two children, and she would bring them over and the pair would fondle while we all looked on aghast. This took considerable time to pick up steam. Initially, it was easy to sweep under the rug; these visits were infrequent. Yet, seeds of discontent had been planted; my Dad smelled new blood, and it drove him into despairs of sensual avarice. I was too young to see the storm-clouds for what they were; I did not understand adultery, what it meant, how it could destroy lives. What was brewing made the games I played with N look very tame indeed.

#51

There was Ted and I and even though we were not of the same family somehow we shared blood. We each rebelled against our father by being like the others' father: mine was brutally masculine, gross, muscular and gruff; Ted's was literary, effete, effeminate, cultured and flirtatious. When Ted stayed over the doomed festive house, which was every weekend for two years, my Dad abused him mercilessly and Ted enjoyed it. Dad made Ted call him *your highness*, picked on Ted for getting rejected by popular girls, lectured him on sex-smells at midnight when we tried to watch *Saturday Night Live*, and made his own supremacy clear at each available juncture. He was feeding Ted's soul with the stuff of animal strength and it was a kind of intoxicant for Ted to imbibe; Ted was my straight man but was being fertilized for a kind of rebirth as an unrepentant, square-jawed jock. Thus, our blood was crossed.

The weekend nights we went ice skating at the Old York Road Ice Skating Rink, semi-adjacent to Elkins Park Square, also on Old York Road, weren't much for Ted and I: just something to do. Neither of us could ice skate that much. But there was a DJ playing good music over the PA, and taking requests, and a lot of Cheltenham kids hung out at the rink on weekends, so it was a chance to see and be seen. One uneventful ice skating night, I tumbled onto my ass as usual, and rose to see a girl, sitting in a clump of kids, on the bleachers, staring fixedly at me. My next pass, I got in a good look at her, and saw the spell was holding: she was still staring. She was a dirty blonde, thick-set build, with very full lips, a wide mouth, and wearing a dark green winter hat. I made up my mind: my next pass, I was going to stare as fixedly at her as she was at me. Ted was floating in the environs somewhere, and didn't know what was going on. So, here I came, looking at the girl in the green winter hat I'd never seen before, who seemed to want a piece of my action. I was close enough to make my presence known to her; we locked eyes; and what I saw in the delicate blue eyes was a sense of being startled, shocked into awareness somehow. Only, there was something so raw, so frank in them that I had to look away. My next, and final pass for the time being, the same thing happened. My eyes were startled, in an animal way, by how startled, how riveted her own eyes were, and I found myself unable to prolong contact. As Ted and I hung in the changing room, which had picnic tables and benches in it and doubled as a hang out space, I relayed to Ted, not without pride, what had happened. Ted was a reasonable, rather than a jealous type, but shy. So, the mysterious dirty blonde sat with her friends still, unmolested by us. Edward, our close acquaintance, a year older than us but kind, and conversant with almost everyone at the rink, was someone I could consult, so I did. I pointed her out, and he said, "Oh, that's Nicole. Do you know her?" "No, I was just curious. Thanks, Eddie." He chuckled, and left us alone, close acquaintanceship not guaranteeing me any more than that. I had wild hopes that Nicole would burst dramatically into the hang-out room with her friends, and perhaps propose marriage to me. When the gaggle of kids including Nicole, who had all been bleacher-hounding, left, they walked past us, down the steps and out. Nicole did not venture a final glance. For several months after that, I hoped Ted and I would see Nicole at the rink, but we did not. It was a lesson in the live-wire nature of desire, as it lives between people— how flames both begin to burn and are extinguished, out of nowhere, at the behest of forces no one really understands. Ted, that night, did his rounds, building a solid structure which would enable him to become a popular kid at CHS. I lit somebody on fire, but in such a way that all that could come from it was subsumed beneath implacable surfaces. Somewhere, I felt instinctively, was the key to the mystery I was looking for. Even if finding that key meant riding confusing, misleading, and/or agonizing waves.

#53

We had many adventures, Ted and I, but the roles we played were always the same. I was Quixote to Ted's Sancho Panza. If we were pelted with snowballs or pelting others with snowballs, staring at girls or being stared at by girls, making prank calls or getting calls from friends, always it was my job to instigate the action, be a man of daring, direct our movements. Ted would consolidate our activity, provide focus. He was the solid man. When I would push things too far, he'd reign me in. We grew into adolescence as an odd couple par excellence; Ted quiet, me raging, Ted pliant, me baiting. However much of my father's dominance Ted internalized, I was still able to steer things when I wanted to. Unlike N, Ted had no taste for self-made drama; things (me included) came to him. There was a long time in which neither of us could imagine a withdrawal for any reason.

There was, as ever, no reason for me to be at camp anymore: it was all sports, ball-sweat, and male camaraderie. I had become an artist and needed to be nurtured. My cabin was full of jocks and I was victimized and it was a nadir in my life. Yet I was tough enough that they couldn't beat me up and so physical abuse never happened. I was forced to bear the awkwardness of having once been a jock, and then moved on. Everyone knew this, so their jibes, as though I were an established geek, tended to fall flat. I could still swing a baseball bat like a pro, and that was that. My only relief was a stage in a Recreation Hall on which I set up my gear and I would press the distortion button on my Peavey and empty myself completely. There were bats nested in the ceiling and a battered piano and it was the only congenial place on the camp grounds where my solitude was real. Looking at the nested bats, hanging up in a line, I felt a sense of kinship with a place left raw, not untouched by man but not too touched either. The Rec Hall was a dilapidated mess of sodden, splinter-granting wood, culminating in a slanted, tent-like roof like a country church. On a day to day basis, it was mostly unused, even as it was flanked, on either side, by a wood-shop and a metal-shop space. Tony, the counselor in charge of wood-shop, would sometimes peek through one of the open windows to comment on something I'd played. As a kid who only intermittently took lessons, I knew some ground-level music theory and no more. This, Tony spotted. Random kids came in to listen and it might as well have been an activity that could be signed up for like volleyball or kayaking. A kid willing to be that dogged and that alone was a sort of freak show. The kids got a taste of continuance (stinging phrases, me practicing finger vibrato, over and over) and I was shadow-bracketed, including to myself.

Dad was becoming unsettled and unsettling. Frequent inexplicable rages degenerated into depressions; fits of distemper gave way to a kind of ecstasy, self-contained and silent. Had I been an adult, the situation would've been obvious to discern; Dad's got a new girlfriend. Responsibilities had been put on the backburner; two children and a wife had been secretly toppled in favor of fresh, feverous fucking. The mood of the house became bullet-riddled; everything he did was a shot, a substantiation of newly kindled potency. I was starting high school and do not remember feeling sanguine. There was an excitement to Dad's new heightened sensibility, but it was the excitement of grasped-for risk; it had no stability in it, and as I walked the halls of this new school I had nothing to hold onto. I tried to mirror Dad's excitement but my own potency felt shrunken by pain and the usual frustrations of being a freshman. On my tie-dye: Jimi Hendrix.

#56

We had gone, briefly, to Disney World. Dad's ferment was obvious, but he muzzled it. One night, we were about to go to Epcot Center and I had the TV on. I saw a picture of a downed plane and the name of one of my then-heroes. I thought, of course, that he had been killed, and I entered a strange zone. I was sucked up into what felt like a void: my senses, materially unaltered, felt spiritually different, as if I was disconnected from the jubilant scenes that passed before my eyes (babies, families, six foot smiling rodents). Epcot was spaced, from attraction to attraction, as though it could be hills, small inclines, or flat terrain at any moment. Crowds of people moved in random formations in all directions, while other crowds stood and stared at what was in the enclosure areas. I was sucked up, from the inside out, into a space of non-being, where I reflected back a sense of there-ness which I did not feel. From being in a foreign place, among this many foreign bodies, I felt my consciousness lifting upwards and plunging downwards at the same time. Epcot was about space, and space games, and I moved into line with a space I had never felt before, and could not identify. Though it later turned out that it wasn't my hero who died, the other world I had entered, a void world, impressed me with its force and negative vivacity. Negativity, where this realm was concerned, was not the same as emotional depression; it was alienation from the condition of bodily awareness, and a realization of fluidities amidst seeming solidities. It was a taste of real death, or life-in-death.

#57

A superficial calm held the tenuous balance of things for a while. I went on long walks to buy guitar strings, listening to Pink Floyd bootlegs. One morning I overslept and was late for science class. I did not realize it, but I was afraid to wake up. There were too many changes in the air and I could not rest. Ted was not in any of my classes; neither was N. I felt deprived of security and safety. My youth assured that I did not realize, or half-realized I had these feelings. I imitated Dad's gruffness; I sneered like he did; I had a hard shell. I played so long and so intensely that my calloused cuticles bulged. This was when I finally got the hang of finger vibrato, the stumbling block that stops competent guitarists from becoming good. The sound of a sustained, vibrato-laden note was my sound: a cry in the dark.

One night, Dad came into my room later than usual. It was his habit to discourse, and I was his captive audience. He was bright; I listened. Tonight, he openly confessed to having a new girlfriend. She was “a little magic”. She was younger, had two kids. She was the woman he’d been groping over the summer. I was left to piece these things together. Dad insinuated that a move was imminent; as things developed, this woman’s magic would permeate, transform, and refurbish our lives. What could I say? Dad was eager for me to meet this magician, this enchantress. A date was set; we would have dinner, and I would see. There was no room to argue or maneuver, to dissuade. This was a fait accompli, a springboard to a higher level, rather than a descent into cruelty and greed. I wanted to believe Dad’s rhetoric rather than incur his ire, so I acquiesced. Things did not feel very magical.

#59

Our dinner with the enchantress had the feel of a covert operation. We snuck out when no one was looking. It was a brisk night in early autumn; all light had vanished as we pulled into the parking lot of a Friday's-type joint. By this time, I had been allotted the role of father to my father; I was to oversee his actions, approve them, endure his impetuosity and confer forbearance on his enterprise. She was there; a slight, pretty lady in her early thirties. Her mouth, I noticed immediately, never closed; not because she was talking, but because she was perpetually startled, innocently shocked by everything. Just as I was overseeing Dad, he was overseeing her; manipulating her innocence into compliance, overwhelming her insecurities with certitude. He sat in the booth next to her, rather than across from her, and his hands weaved a determined path over all her pliant skin. He was playing to win.

#60

Now all pretenses of normalcy and calm were dropped. Once I had conferred my (suddenly papal) blessing, my father's dynamism was terrific. We would move, he and I, into a new house with the enchantress and her two kids. Before I knew it the thing was arranged; a new house was waiting, of the same design, and right around the corner from the old one. The enchantress left her husband and my dad left his wife and their baby. This cyclone of activity insured that Dad and the enchantress never really got to know each other. The enchantress and I barely spoke at all. She was not bright; her lure was all physical. She was afraid of me like she was afraid of everything else. Dad held me to my paternal role. He professed to need me and I rationalized everything. Festive had given way to festering.

#61

In the new house I had two small rooms: a bedroom and a “playroom” that I used for music. Importantly, however, the new house was uncarpeted, raw, wood-floored, underfurnished. It was also unwashed, grungy with soot and ash. The festive sense of airy expansiveness was replaced with a sense of dread and foreboding. However big the house was, I was always in Dad’s line of fire; he was undistracted, as he had been before, by others, and was even more morose than usual. This meant that my two or three or four nights a week there were fearful ones. Subconsciously, I began to move myself, and my physiology, back to Old Farm Road, now that the age of luxuriance was collapsed. The situation with Dad and his ferocious temper was a ticking time-bomb, especially as I did have a worthwhile place to retreat to. For that moment’s duration, I had a Les Paul and insomnia and I would pace and play with no amp into the wee hours. It became known at Cheltenham that I was a guitar player and soon older kids were interested in me. Before long I was in a band. The other guys were older and had cars. I was a freshman and looked even younger. Yet I became more or less the leader. We had to pick songs that we could sing: *Smithereens*, *After Midnight* (the real, fast version, not the beer commercial), but I had to convince them I could sing *Whipping Post*, well past my range. As with Ted, I became the Quixote, mad musical scientist. This was my first band but I knew instinctively our time together wouldn’t be long. I learned that not everyone who plays has any real commitment to playing; some just do it to be cool, or because it’s there, or to feel special. So I decided to give them only half of me; that’s what I did, which put me, again, at least sometimes, on terra firma, in the driver’s seat of my life.

#62

A sense of things not being right manifested in the new house immediately. I had nothing to say to the enchantress or her children; they had nothing to say to me. Dad's gaiety became shrill and forced. I had no good advice for him; he had given me a role I could not begin to fulfill. Within six weeks, the enchantress and her children were gone, back to the husband and father they had abandoned. Dad and I were alone in a creepy house, a shadow of the one we had so lately left. Dad's reaction to this stunning failure was to ape superiority; that though everything had gone wrong it was not his responsibility. Others had let him down. He had always been flinty; he became flintier. I was overwhelmed by the feeling of having been involved in a spectacular mess; I felt and shared Dad's criminality, which he himself had (to and for himself) abjured. I bore the burdens that he would not.

#63

Ted and I went to see *Dead Again* in Jenkintown. Continuance had been broken; we were in high school and had no classes together and did not see each other every weekend. Dad picked us up from the theater and tried to establish some of the old master/slave rapport with Ted. It didn't work; Ted played along, but the charm of the festive house had been overtaken by general creepiness and the feeling wasn't the same. Once we were home for the night I could see that Ted wanted to leave. There were ghosts and echoes here but not like Mill Road; these were ghosts created by lust, inconsideration, precipitance, and madness. Dad's new thing was to posit the whole experience as having been "no big deal"; he had no notion that others had been forced to experience anguish, on his behalf and at his behest.

#64

Dad had a brother who was not significant, to him or me. He would show up for short periods of time: six months here, a year there, and then disappear again. However, he came to the new house with a prophecy. He had been to a psychic; the psychic had guessed my name, and predicted that I would soon reject Dad forever, and that if he wanted to salvage anything, he had better hurry up. It took a lot of nerve for my uncle to say this with both Dad and I sitting right there, but he did. Dad shrugged; I said it was bullshit; but it hit too close to home, and I made quick to leave the kitchen. I went down to my room and turned on the radio; I heard *Great Gig in the Sky*, at the exact moment where a voice says, *if you can hear me say whisper, you're dying*. It was New Year's Eve, 1991.

By February, Dad and I were in an apartment at Oak Summit Apartments on Easton Road, a half-mile from the two houses. It was a drab space with low ceilings, narrow windows, and wooden floors. Moreover, the smallness and squatness of the place pandered to Dad's compulsion to head-hunt and abuse. There was no way to avoid him now. His abuse-routes became sure-handed. Even as the safety valve of Old Farm Road held, making my weeks a rollercoaster to ride, or a maelstrom to fall into. I had no way of knowing— I was in luck. Mom had already decided that as per Dad's disturbing behavior, if I decided to seek permanent shelter at Old Farm Road, I would not be forced to return to the Oak Summit apartment, where Dad's ubiquity imposed itself on me most severely. Mom had a sense of compassion that was benevolent in my direction. She was monitoring the situation closely. Dad slept a lot. Though I never saw her, the enchantress made frequent nocturnal visits. Catastrophe had left Dad's libido intact; she was apparently similar. One night, Dad had a friend over and they commenced to make fun of my musical aspirations. If I followed music through, they said, I'd wind up working in a gas station. I'd be a complete flop and failure, an embarrassment, in the world. This was said as a quip and caused great hilarity between the two thugs. I was devastated, not realizing the incredible cowardice and cruelty of disappointed, inappropriately honest, men. I was not generally prone to tears, but I, privately, wept bitterly. I felt like I'd been hit by a typhoon, and I had. In a way, though, this was good. It gave momentum to something that was building inside of me. I saw the absurdity of being my father's father and his whipping boy as well. Something had to be done, but I didn't know what. The sense of responsibility I had towards Dad remained. Winter slogged on.

#66

It was around the time of Dad's birthday: April 28. I asked him what he wanted; he said he didn't know. He suggested we go to a bookstore and he'd pick something out. We went to a bookstore and he didn't pick anything out. The next day was April 28 and I didn't have a present for him. He flew into a rage; I was hit with a typhoon again. *You make me feel like shit*, he bellowed. Only, rage made him happy and secure. He was fine. I was the one who felt like shit. I was a father who couldn't please an adolescent son who was my father. Things were nearing a peak of misery; for the first time in my life, I was hitting a wall that I knew I could never get over. Something major had to change, or damages would start to become irreparable. How could I play, develop, grow, in an atmosphere like this? Dad would be in my face, willy-nilly; my guitar needed to be actively courted, continually pursued. I would either be abused or leave. The path of my departure was free.

#67

Ted's birthday was in early May and he had a party. Ted's house on Woodlawn Avenue had a front façade of windows which ran the length of the house, which was not set on a hill but also had a large white shed attendant on the backyard. It was my fate, in a year's time, to smoke pot there for the first time. Woodlawn Avenue, as privatized as my stretch of Mill Road which was not far away (though Mill Road was only a memory then), did a rustic trick, inside and outside of Ted's house, of making everything crepuscular. A sunset realm. N was there, in shorts and a tee-shirt. Everyone was watching *Die Hard* but I put my left hand on N's bare right knee. It was very forward and she didn't resist. The spring twilight had enchanted us. The creek ran. Fate had decreed, in N's acceptance of my hand, that I would gain, finally, a girlfriend, and lose a father. The party would end but she was mine. I decided; I would never go back to Dad's apartment again. My Mom had been waiting patiently for me to see through his posturing; now, I did. I knew all this while everyone watched the movie and N smiled in her Scorpio way. That Sunday, Dad called to ask when I'd be coming home, but it was too late. The next time I entered Dad's apartment, it was to collect my stuff; he wasn't even there. I was ready to live on Old Farm Road with Mom, ready to be young again and to live however I wanted, without fear of random senseless typhoons blowing me over. The credits rolled; Ted shot me a look of clean dirtiness. This was the end of my beginning; in my beginning was no end.

Several years later, on a semester break from college, I sat with N by Tookany Creek. Across the stream, up the slope, across also the gravel path, I saw the backyard, with shed, which had been mine when I lived on Mill Road. I said to N, “Do you feel any different now than when we first met? Do you like your life better?” N deliberated, smoothing the grass plots beneath her fingers, then answered, “Yeah. I would say I do. I have to keep changing, though. The circumstances of my life won’t allow me to stay still.” The stillness of the creek hadn’t changed. I couldn’t think of what to say. N also bothered to add, “I think you know what I mean.” I did, and said, “Of course, but being here is nice for me. It’s nice to know that some things don’t change.” N giggled, “Remember, Adam, this is your old ‘hood, not mine. I don’t relate to it the way you do.” We sat. When we were about ready to go (I was driving), I said to N, “There’s one last thing I want to say before we leave. I want you to admit that the way we talk hasn’t changed that much over the years. We still talk like we did when we were kids. And I have no desire to keep anything the same, but I want you to know that I’ll always have a place in my heart for you, N. You were the one who opened up my head to a wider vision of reality. You made it possible for me to see beyond myself. You were the right kind of witch to teach me the lesson that all things are connected, and that I could connect to whatever I wanted to. And if I’m dramatizing, I hope you’ll forgive me.” We both laughed. N held my hand. “Here’s what to remember about me, Adam. I’m a witch, and my witchcraft is about destroying boundary lines. The boundary lines between us can never be that pronounced. Even if you never get quite what you want from me, which you don’t. Think of us together as having a space for two souls which only we fit into. After that, the mystery has to remain.” We laughed again. Then, we stood for a minute, the creek mildly but steadily singing its approval, and then drove off, into the sunset.

Steve Halle on "Posit": Fluid/Exchange (2007)

Adam Fieled's Posit: with an I to an I for an I

Postulation of one's own existence via tempest-in-a-teapot verse will not cut it anymore, and despite Mr. Fieled's recent posts about a new and exciting confessionalism, he wants to shake contemporary mainstream poetics to its core in his new *Dusie* chap *Posit*.

In Lewis MacAdams's book *Birth of the Cool*, MacAdams describes Paris's post WWII existentialist crowd, led by Sartre, as calling themselves "les rats," but what happens to existence and the self-as-meaning-maker when something bigger comes along? This is precisely the question taken on by Fieled in his poem "Le Chat Noir" (The Black Cat). The poem's layers allow for varied interpretations from the confessional: I smoke some pot and wander into an alley in freezing cold weather and a black cat crosses my path, oh shit; to the philosophical: I'm feeling something, I'm cold and high and surrounded by darkness (Creeley's "I Know a Man" anyone?) This feels real, but then superstition intrudes in the form of the black cat. In an existentialist reading, if they are "the rats," as the "I" of this poem seems to be, then what to do when the black cat comes along? After all, cats kill rats, right? We can make no meaning of making this meaning except to say "look a cat / a black cat le chat noir oh no" and perhaps run away, O'Hara like, from this clear and present danger. Or we can return to a quasi-literal reading of stoned speaker dreaming the 19th century Parisian bohemian cabaret *Le Chat Noir* appearing in a Philadelphian hallucination...

While I think "Le Chat Noir" the cleverest, and haply most ambiguous, poem in *Posit*, the title poem's not bad either, giving us the straightforward location of this chap in dealing with the first person:

I want
but that's
nothing new.

I posit
no boundary
between us.

Of course, the poem looks the part, shaped as it is like a giant "I," and asserting the way in which contemporary mainstream poetry attempts to connect with readers, "I say you, / I know you, / I think so," covering the I-you relationship of Rimbaud's "I is another" while leaving room for the fashionable, if nowadays heavy-handed, indeterminacy in poetry. In a closed circuit such as the I-you, the third person never gets asserted, and a real arrogance exists in believing one knows another rather than having the wisdom to call the other, other. This brand of poetry "could / go on / forever," politically and correctly asserting the I knows everything, everywhere, everyone.

But then the cats and eyes/Is also emerge in the fine poem "Eyeballs," a poem playing with

the story of Oedipus, who married his mother, Jocasta, and tore out his eyes upon discovering so. Jocasta commits suicide and therein we lay our scene of eyeballs beneath dangling feet. Jocasta's "stout / ex-maenad" maid comes upon the scene, and instead of being horrified, she pockets the eyeballs in a moment of Dionysian/Maenadian-mystery, as the lurid things resemble grapes. Then, oh no, the eyeballs become even more lurid, playthings for her cats, (perhaps they are black, the poem doesn't say). How absurd! It's easy to make some existential meaning out of that: cats don't kill rats, they play with eyeballs...I-balls. As Fieled indicates in loosely veiled lines, poet and speaker in unison, at the end of the poem, "Perhaps there is / use for everything." (the eyes, the I, this myth) "and if I am a thief, / who will accuse me?" More than a little intimation of Thomas Stearns Eliot (or T-Sizzle, as I call him) in that line, eh?

While Fieled crams a great deal of thought into a small-chap space, some of the poems disintegrate into sexual innuendo, which does not scratch my readerly itches, as it were. For example, "10:15 Saturday Night" begins with such promise, using speech-inspired, pick-up line type verse:

then like how bout we give this
thing a chance or at least not bury it
beneath a dense layer of this could
be anyone, we could be anyone,
anyone could be doing this, just
another routine, another way of
saying hello, & goodbye just
and here's where he loses me:
around the corner like a dull
dawn layered thick in creamy
clouds, ejaculations spent

The poem loses me at the end because I think I was getting to the sex anyway, more subtly from the pickup language, which gets mighty heady in transposing sex-as-physical-act for the sex-as-end-all-be-all-moment, so that I didn't need the hammer of ejaculations spent on me (pun intended, I guess). Or maybe I'm wrong, and this is why I write in the first place to use my (jungle cat-like) poet's rhetorical nimbleness to turn rock-head, jock-head pick up lines into "creamy clouds" of post-coital detritus.

All in all, Fieled's Posit is a solid read. It's lurid and surreally entertaining enough to bring me through once and packed with enough thought-meat to keep me chewing, thinking and returning, which is ultimately what we all want from poetry.

Brooklyn Copeland on “Chimes”: Stoning the Devil (2009)

“To be perfectly honest, I was equally excited and skeptical about reading this, and I still wouldn’t want to read about EVERY poet’s childhood/adolescence... especially not in such literal terms. But the fact is that Adam has created a very likeable character, and it’s that character (and what he chooses to reveal v. what he leaves out) that keeps you reading from one colorful burst of recollection to the next- and even forget that you’re reading "poetry." Many of his subjects are immediate, from takes on fractured family life to experiences with classic rock music, but the presentation is a really comfy blend of fresh-enough perspective and common-ground heartache/insecurity/self-obsessiveness. I hate the word “poignant,” but that’s the one that comes to mind. You almost wonder if you’ve seen this character before, in a classic novella or short story- Salinger or early Roth. Or as Bud Cort in Harold and Maude. There’s also something kooky and affected about the tone sometimes- almost like an imitation of an older way of talking. Like listening to old recordings of the first modernist poets. It’s usually pretty endearing. Since I don’t know Adam personally, I’m allowed to say something like that. It’s a lovely book all-around. You can’t NOT like it. The design is cool, too...”

